



Consumer Federation of America

March 6, 2006

Dear Representative:

Consumer Federation of America would like to express our concern regarding the practice of using carbon monoxide gas in the packaging of case-ready red meat and ground meat. Carbon monoxide masks the natural coloration of meat by reacting with myoglobin in the meat, producing a bright red color. This coloration has been found to last beyond the time of spoilage thus masking the true color and freshness of meat packaged with carbon monoxide.

In reviewing this practice, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) examined industry data regarding the safety of the carbon monoxide itself. However, FDA did not look at issues of consumer deception that can occur when meat remains bright red past the time of spoilage. CFA agrees that the minute amount of carbon monoxide used in this packaging itself poses no risk to consumers' health. Nevertheless, it is inherently misleading to consumers to disguise the actual freshness of the meat product by masking its natural coloration and it may also mask whether the meat is spoiled, putting consumer health at risk.

Consumers rely heavily on color in selecting fresh meat products and identify a bright red color with freshness and wholesomeness. The use of carbon monoxide hides the visual clues that consumers utilize on a regular basis to determine the safety and freshness of their meat. Without these clues, consumers are unable to determine if the meat they are purchasing for their families is truly fresh.

States should have the flexibility to pass laws that go above and beyond Federal standards to protect their citizens from practices they deem unsafe or deceptive. We strongly encourage you to support the efforts of states to maintain or enact food labeling laws and food safety laws that protect their citizens.

Sincerely,

Chris Waldrop
Deputy Director, Food Policy Institute
Consumer Federation of America