



Consumer Federation of America

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CFA Urges Wal-Mart to Come Clean on CO-Treated Meat

Consumer Federation of America learned today that Wal-Mart is apparently selling fresh meat treated with carbon monoxide, despite repeated claims by the retailer in news reports disavowing the practice. An investigative report aired last night by WKMG-TV, a CBS affiliate in Orlando, Florida, featured results from tests performed by University of Florida scientists on meat purchased at Wal-Mart stores. The tests demonstrated that meat purchased from Wal-Mart was treated with carbon monoxide, which maintains a bright red color in the meat, potentially masking the visible signs of spoilage. CFA has written to the FDA and USDA to ban this inherently deceptive practice. The news report is available on the Web at: <http://www.local6.com/news/9220774/detail.html>

Chris Waldrop, Deputy Director for the Food Policy Institute at CFA said, "Consumers are now being deceived twice. Using carbon monoxide in packaging of fresh meat deceives consumers into thinking their meat may be fresher than it really is. And now Wal-Mart is deceiving its customers by claiming it doesn't carry CO-treated meat when it apparently does.

"We hope Wal-Mart will end this practice in their stores once and for all, as they have repeatedly claimed over the last few months. At the very least, Wal-Mart needs to come clean about their use of this product. These revelations underscore the need for the FDA and the USDA to act now to protect consumers and ban this practice."

Below are quotes from Wal-Mart spokespeople denying the use of carbon monoxide:

Print:

Bentonville-based Wal-Mart Stores began testing carbon monoxide-treated meat at about 100 stores in Arkansas and Missouri in May. "Because we did not think the consumer response warranted our offering the product, we discontinued the test several weeks ago," Wal-Mart spokesman Karen Burk said. The products weren't labeled as being carbon monoxide -treated because federal regulations don't require it, she said. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, March 19, 2006, *Latest Packaging Helps Meat Keep That Rosy Hue*, by Cristal Cody)

Last May, Wal-Mart tested select meat cuts packed in low oxygen, modified-atmosphere packaging in about 100 stores in Arkansas and Missouri, spokeswoman Karen Burk said. "Because we did not think the consumer response warranted our offering the product, we discontinued the test several weeks ago," she said. In a limited number of stores, not including any in Nebraska, Wal-Mart also carried what Burk called a very small supply of branded meat products with low oxygen packaging. "We recently made the decision to discontinue ordering these products, because we felt that there was not sufficient demand, and our customers were telling us that they preferred other alternatives," she said. (Lincoln Journal Star, March 12, 2006, *Carbon Monoxide Controversy*)

Wal-Mart carries lamb and veal treated with carbon monoxide because the retailer wouldn't be able to stock them otherwise, says spokeswoman Gail Lavielle, but no other meats are packaged that way. Wal-Mart tested a broader range of carbon monoxide - treated meat in some Midwestern stores but found that it didn't help with inventory management and didn't increase customer demand, Lavielle says. (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, February 23, 2006, *Technology to Maintain Meat's Color Criticized*, by Elizabeth Lee)

A spokeswoman for Wal-Mart, which increasingly is using "case-ready" meat in the special packaging, said the company tried marketing monoxide-treated meat at about 100 stores in Missouri and Arkansas. It has dropped the products because of a lack of consumer demand, she said. (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, February 19, 2006, *Some Raising Red Flag Over Use of Gas to Keep Meat in the Pink*, by Amy McConnell Schaarsmith)

Broadcast:

A spokesperson with Wal-Mart says "We actually tested this new product with the carbon monoxide packaging with select cuts in about one hundred stores, but we decided not to pursue it. So, at this time we're not offering that CO packaging with our meats." (WSAZ NewsChannel 3, Charleston, WV, Tuesday Feb 21, 2006 05:36 AM EST, NewsChannel 3 at Sunrise)

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Consumer Federation of America is a non-profit association of 300 consumer groups, representing more than 50 million Americans. It was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy. The Food Policy Institute at CFA works to promote a safer, healthier and more affordable food supply.