Hot Dog! It's Safe to Eat Cured Meats

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture finally has admitted that most nitrite-cured meats do not form dangerous nitrosamines when cooked.

This means it is all right to eat fried, broiled, baked, boiled or microwaved hot dogs, corned beef, ham, sausages and luncheon meats.

Bacon will be monitored to see that nitrosamines limits are kept.

This may settle a dispute that began Nov. 10, 1975, when the USDA proposed to ban use of nitrites and nitrates in baby foods and meats.

The action was based upon a single research project with laboratory rats, conducted by a scientist named Newberne at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He said nitrosamines caused cancer.

Competency of Newbern's limited study was challenged immediately and ultimately discounted, but the USDA order has had far-reaching economic effects. It upset hog producers' production plans, caused consumers to shun pork products, prompted packers to pay less for hogs, encouraged a shift to oil-seed materials and tended to reduce farm income.

The nitrite incident, unfortunately, is only one of a number of such instances where federal agencies have grabbed results of superficial research and lambasted the public with costly regulations. One of the first was the famous "Cranberry Scare" of years back, but the Environmental Protection Agency and Food & Drug Administration, as well as USDA, have been busy in the "ban first, investigate later" activities that have removed many beneficial products from markets.

The FDA, it will be remembered, banned saccharin as "a potential cancer agent," leaving millions of diabetics and dieters with no satisfactory substitute sweetener. The public was very unhappy.

Eventually, FDA Administrator Donald Kennedy admitted, "There is neither enough evidence to accept nor to reject the hypothesis that use of artificial sweeteners, especially saccharin, increases the risk of bladder cancer in humans." The ban was lifted.

A major portion of the research upon which chemical and food additive bans are based assumes that humans will react to them in the same manner as laboratory animals, even though the animals may receive massive amounts. The law assumes there is no "safe low dose" for chemicals that might cause cancer at high doses.

Calculations based upon the dosages of chemicals used to induce malignancies in small animals have produced some bizarre comparisons when applied to human beings. Here are a few examples:

- In order to get an amount of sodium cyclamate comparable to that which caused effects in mice and rats, an adult would have to drink from 138 to 552 bottles of diet soda per day.
- To get any amount of safrole, a flavoring, a person would have to drink 613 (12-ounce) bottles of root beer daily.
- A person would have to eat 5,500 pounds of DES-residue beef liver per day to consume a therapeutic dose of DES.
- A person eating six pieces of bacon or two slices of bologna daily would have a 1-in-7400 chance of developing cancer from this source.

The list of controversial chemicals, which many argue have benefits that far outweigh the risks, is extensive. Included are DDT; chlordane; 2,4-D; 2,4,5-T, and many other herbicides and insecticides.

EPA recently backed down on spraying regulations that would have required farmers or commercial operators to obtain written permission from everyone in or near the area to be treated. The reason was that regulations were published in the "Proposed Rules Section" of the Federal Register instead of in the "Notices Section." This may come up again.

When environmentalists claimed 2,4,5-T used to destroy brush near Broken Bow caused abortions and miscarriages, the State Department of Health investigated. No connection between the pregnancy problems and the chemical could be found. But the banning marches on.

This month, EPA announced a proposal to ban all agricultural and home use of the pesticide, lindane. The announcement said lindane causes cancer, fetal damage and nerve damage in test animals. EPA said residues have been found in human fat, city air and rain water, and linked it to unspecified instances of aplastic anemia in humans.