

October 7, 2009

LETTER

The Safety of Beef: The Meat Industry Responds

To the Editor:

Re “[The Burger That Shattered Her Life](#): Trail of E. Coli Shows Flaws in Ground Beef Inspection System” (front page, Oct. 4):

The meat industry has made great strides in improving the safety of our products: according to the Department of Agriculture, despite changes in the government’s program that have made E. coli testing much more sensitive, the incidence of E. coli O157:H7 in ground beef declined 45 percent since 2000 and now occurs at a rate of less than one half of 1 percent. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, E. coli O157:H7 infections in people have decreased by 44 percent since 2000.

The American Meat Institute and its members have worked aggressively to develop new technologies and processes to enhance meat and poultry safety. Using them requires prior approval by the Department of Agriculture.

For example, A.M.I. submitted a petition five years ago to use carcass irradiation — a process to reduce or eliminate pathogens like E. coli — but we are still waiting for the department to initiate a rulemaking on its efficacy.

The meat industry has a single-mindedness when it comes to E. coli O157:H7 — we want to eliminate it. But like other facts of nature — from floods to the flu — even when there is a will, there may not always be a way to do it 100 percent of the time. Be assured that the industry will not stop trying.

J. Patrick Boyle
President and Chief Executive
American Meat Institute
Washington, Oct. 6, 2009

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