

## **USDA PROPOSED RULE CHANGE**

*Written by Bob Forbes, Government Liaison Services  
January 25, 2012*

USDA is proposing to eliminate review of all meat and poultry ingredient statements and formulas by their labeling specialists. USDA regulations require that all ingredients, including allergens, be listed in the ingredient statement of every meat product sold in the U.S. But ingredient labeling is very complex and mistakes are made. When a USDA labeling specialist compares and reviews formula information submitted by the manufacturer against ingredients declared on the product label, undeclared allergen errors are PREVENTED! Products will not be approved and cannot enter commerce until the label is corrected and allergens are properly declared on the product label. USDA's December 5, 2011 proposal will stamp out this consumer safeguard.

Generic approval means meat processors approve their own labels instead of USDA labeling specialists. USDA permitted limited generic approval beginning in 1996. Prior to 1996, all labels were submitted to USDA's labeling specialists who approved them after confirming that, among other things, all the ingredients in the food were properly declared on the label. At first the industry was reluctant to approve their own labels because they weren't sure they were correct. Many relied on the guidance provided by USDA labeling specialists and many still do today. Since 1996, more and more processors began to take advantage of the opportunity to approve their own labels. Over the past few years, USDA has more actively encouraged them to do so. In 1995 there were zero recalls due to undeclared allergens. Recalls for undeclared allergens have increased steadily ever since. By 2009, there were 14, in 2010, 16, and last year there were 41 involving at least 500,000 pounds of product, and this is just the tip of the iceberg. Many more undeclared allergen errors go unnoticed entirely because a generic label application form, formula, and processing procedures are not required to be submitted to USDA for review. Accordingly, the mislabeling is never discovered either prior to or after entering the marketplace. Since the product formula was never disclosed to labeling headquarters, no one but the manufacturer knows what's in the product! This results in many unsuspecting consumers experiencing adverse reactions caused by ingredients they did not know they were ingesting.

The subject proposal would end all review of ingredients statements by USDA labeling specialists. Even if the processor wanted USDA guidance on whether everything was properly declared, USDA would not provide it. So far, many processors and their associations have voiced concern that without USDA labeling specialist review they may inadvertently put a product on the market that is mislabeled. That's a big problem for the processor and a bigger problem for the allergy sufferer.

You may review a copy of the lengthy proposal at

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FRPubs/2005-0016.pdf> )

From there you may also file a comment with USDA. You may also contact your Congressional Representatives. To obtain contact information for your Congressional representative you may access: [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and enter your zip code in the upper right corner under the heading "Find Your Representative". To contact your senators go to: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and select your state from the pull down menu in the upper right corner of the page.