

**Presentation  
By  
Rosemary Mucklow  
Director Emeritus  
National Meat Association  
To  
Berkeley Breakfast Club  
Friday, August 1, 2008**

Good morning! I've had to wait for many years before I received a kind and generous invitation to come and speak to you! My mother used to tell me that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. I hope you have all enjoyed a good breakfast here this morning, and that I will thus be able to find your hearts! I know that my dear brother-in-law Errol Mauchlan loves his porridge here at the Breakfast Club so you all know the way to his heart!

My friend and business associate, Jerry Siebert, who unfortunately cannot be here this morning, suggested that I tell you how safe our food supply is. Having worked for meat packers and processors for nearly fifty years, it is generally agreed by both the industry and the regulators that I know where the bones are buried, and that I am very straightforward. There is a simple reason: I like to eat meat! I prefer to eat meat over poultry. I like a small piece of fish every so often, but I still go back to my comfort food from my early days in Scotland – mince and potatoes – which is really ground beef with onion in gravy poured over potatoes for that easy, quick-to-fix meal after a long day's work! Try it – you might like it!

You are quite a sophisticated audience and I suspect that there are few vegetarians here today. Meat is good for the body. It contains essential nutrients and proteins, along with some fat, and it is basically a very satisfying constituent in a balanced diet, but I am not here to talk about nutrition. I'm here to talk about the safety of meat.

We have a complex system in the United States to ensure that the meat you buy at the supermarket or eat in a fast food restaurant, or in a white tablecloth restaurant, or here at the Berkeley City Club is safe. You will all be familiar with a book that Upton Sinclair wrote over a century ago about the terrible working conditions in meat factories in Chicago. In those days, farmers trekked their animals into the big cities, the livestock walked up several ramps where they were stunned and then slaughtered, and they descended down through these old multi-story factories by gravity and at each step further processing, mostly with very sharp knives, was accomplished. Sinclair's effort at social reform in the Chicago factories turned into a lasting indictment of the old line packers of those days – Gustavus Swift, Philip Armour, Thomas Wilson, Nelson Morris, Edward Cudahy, and others. Sinclair's social reform took a back seat to the passage, under President Theodore Roosevelt, of the first Federal Meat Inspection Act in 1906. The law addressed fundamentals for the production of safe meat, in sanitary conditions. It

required the presence of a USDA veterinarian to look at all livestock to make sure they were visibly fit to enter the food supply which we call *ante mortem* inspection, and to reaffirm this decision once they were on the processing floor by having inspectors paid by the government look at their vital organs which is where disease would show up. We call this second inspection *post mortem*. This law remained virtually untouched until 1967, when the law was substantially updated and provided for States to participate in the inspection system as equal partners through cooperative agreements with USDA. Some further amendments were made by my good friend, then Congressman Charles Stenholm in 1986, but they sunsetted on a technicality six years later. It may be of interest to you to learn that mandatory poultry inspection did not catch up with meat inspection until after the 1967 law, and that Upton Sinclair was present when then President Lyndon Johnson signed the law on December 16, 1967.

There have been huge regulatory changes in the authorities exercised by the USDA and states that have qualified equal to programs since 1967, but they have all been made through the regulatory process. The law itself continues to require mandatory *ante mortem* and *post mortem* inspection of every single carcass under the supervision of a veterinarian and, depending on the size of the operation, he/she will have non-vet “lay” inspectors to assist. Further, no plant is allowed to operate without inspection. A few have, and they went to jail.

This statutory authority is valuable, even today, to assure that in the commercial food business, only healthy livestock enter the commercial food supply. In recent months, concerns have surfaced that non-ambulatory animals that either don’t want to get up and walk, or cannot walk because of injury or illness, should not enter the food supply, and regulations are now in place to ensure that so-called “downed” livestock does not enter the commercial food supply.

We’ve learned a lot since the early days of animal disease. We know that microorganisms and residues can be present in otherwise healthy appearing livestock, so the industry has cooperated with the USDA in extensive testing of products to minimize the potential of harmful residues and microorganisms. The industry agrees with USDA that if you, as consumers, buy meat that is ready to eat, then it should have been processed in such a way as to eliminate harmful microorganisms. The ones that we need to be most concerned about are *Salmonella*, *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, and *Listeria monocytogenes*. Each one of these wily bacteria is a challenge unto itself, and the industry makes exhaustive efforts to eliminate them during processing.

A major initiative to improve the safety of meat was introduced in the mid-1990s when USDA required all facilities under inspection to develop a HACCP plan. HACCP: Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point – was a preventive system designed by Howard Baumann who worked for Pillsbury to ensure that the food we sent with astronauts into space was as safe as it could possibly be. Every facility that produces and processes meat today has a HACCP plan – and is required to identify the hazards and show how it will eliminate them by validating at critical control points. Further, every facility must ensure that it has at least one person trained in HACCP procedures. The organization that I have

been associated with for nearly 50 years was instrumental in forming the International HACCP Alliance to further the principles of this really important preventive system.

National Meat Association is a membership organization and large and medium-sized firms belong and their principals are our elected Directors. Having spent nearly 50 years in successive positions, I know a great deal about the meat industry! We're the place to come for advice and guidance when there are crises. We were very busy earlier this year when the Humane Society took undercover video in a beef slaughter facility in Southern California. I have personally walked through thousands of slaughter and processing plants across the U.S., worked with senior and middle management to make changes that would help them to comply with the stringent regulatory authority.

Today's slaughter operations are in major states where the animals are raised near the facilities – not in the central cities near the consumer. This change in industry structure has impacted communities and workers. Today's industry structure is vastly different from the days of 1906 when the facilities were in big cities. We can speak more to industry consolidation if you have questions.

Today's consumers are very interested in food safety, and they have old time organizations such as Consumer Federation and newer ones like Safe Tables Our Priority (STOP). They are vocal, and participate on the same advisory panels as the industry at the government table. When we are providing a raw agricultural product to consumers, there is no such thing as zero tolerance! Again, HACCP helps to guide us to prevent and eliminate the hazards, but zero is simply unattainable. Raw meat needs to be cooked, and consumers need to apply the same cross contamination possibilities in the kitchen as industry does in its plants.

USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service is funded by approximately \$1 billion of appropriated funds annually. It has about 7,000 employees, with its headquarters in Washington, but employees at different grade levels throughout the country. Large plants have multiple inspectors, and if they slaughter, they have one or more assigned USDA veterinarians. I have served several terms as a member of the Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection, I am recognized as a strong and powerful advocate for the industry but, even more importantly, as a powerful advocate for safe meat. I am passionate about the industry, and the hard-working men and women who labor daily to produce what I believe is the safest meat supply in the world.

I'd be pleased to answer any questions you might have.