

**Talking Points**  
**In Response to NY Times Editorial on BPI**

- Secretary Vilsack has been clear that there is no mission more important to USDA than ensuring the health and safety of the food served to 31 million school children every day, and we are committed to a comprehensive, coordinated approach to food safety for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).
- Because of USDA's existing interlocking rings of protection, there have been no foodborne outbreaks in schools associated with USDA-purchased products in over 10 years, and USDA foods are equal to, and often exceed, the quality of their commercial counterparts. Among the policies and procedures currently protecting school children are inspection and food safety plan requirements for each cafeteria, rigorous purchasing requirements and testing protocols, and mandatory food safety controls.
- While the existing system has been successful, USDA is committed to ensuring it remains as effective as possible. Secretary Vilsack has ordered an independent review of the testing procedures and requirements for all products supplied by USDA for the NSLP to ensure that school children are safe and healthy and that our purchasing processes are equivalent to or exceed best industry practices.
- Only beef that has successfully completed the inspection requirements by the Food Safety and Inspection Service is eligible to enter into the NSLP. In addition, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) imposes strict requirements on food purchased by USDA for the NSLP to ensure that the food served to our children is safe, such as routine testing of all ground beef products for pathogens before any product is delivered.
- USDA has a zero tolerance for *Salmonella* and *E. coli* 0157:H7 in all AMS beef purchases for the NSLP. Beef that tests positive for these organisms is rejected and never supplied to schools.
- Some confusion may have been caused by a recent New York Times editorial. The contamination referenced in the editorial was discovered in the plant and the affected product was never supplied to schools. No meat produced by BPI has been linked to any illnesses or outbreaks. The New York Times subsequently published a correction that clarified this issue.
- All AMS beef purchases for the NSLP meet very high food safety standards which include stringent pathogen testing. Beef supplied by Beef Products, Incorporated (BPI) for the NSLP is not, and never was, exempt from AMS' strict pathogen testing requirements.
- The BPI meat products are used in many commercial products available in fast food chains, restaurants, retail grocery stores, and non-commercial operations such as hospitals, in addition to schools.

## **Background Information on Ammonium Hydroxide**

The Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Food and Drug Administration consider ammonium hydroxide as a “Generally Recognized As Safe” food additive. (For more information, see [http://www.beefproducts.com/government\\_academic/ISU-Ammonium.pdf](http://www.beefproducts.com/government_academic/ISU-Ammonium.pdf) and <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/fcn/fcnDetailNavigation.cfm?rpt=scogsListing&id=27> )

Ammonium hydroxide is used to produce a lean meat product that is added to ground beef to reduce the overall fat content without compromising flavor. It also has some degree of anti-microbial effect. Ammonium hydroxide also is used in a variety of other processed foods, such as baked goods, gelatins and puddings, and cheeses, and can occur naturally in foods.