



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

JUL - 6 2012

Dr. Urvashi Rangan
Director
Consumer Safety and Sustainability
Consumer Reports
101 Thuman Avenue
Yonkers, New York 10703

Dear Dr. Rangan:

Thank you for your letter of June 18, 2012, regarding meat and poultry labels with the claims of "no antibiotics used." I appreciate the opportunity to address the issues you raise.

I agree with you on the importance of accurate labeling and understand your concerns about the accuracy of animal-raising claims on meat and poultry labels. In this regard, I can report that FSIS has developed updated guidance material to be sent to producers/companies for their use in requesting label approval. This material is now in clearance and should be available to the public later this year.

Under FSIS guidelines, when producers/companies request to make the marketing claim "raised without antibiotics" on their labels, we inform them that this means "no antibiotics in their feed, water or injection including no ionophores" during the animal's life. However, if the claim is not made for the animal's entire life, the label can describe the number of days addressed by the claim as verified by a particular company or producer. Such a claim might be "raised without antibiotics the last 120 days prior to finish."

Currently, USDA cannot mandate that producers/companies use a third-party certifier. Unless the producer/company is self certifying, this process is usually provided for a fee. Marketing third-party certifiers are available, and producers/companies have the option of using and paying for this service.

With regard to the labels you suggest are incorrect, FSIS will investigate the validity of the claims. Please forward a copy of the labels in their entirety and we will contact the companies directly.

Again, thank you for your letter and for your concern for food safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas J. Vilsack". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "T".

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary