

County council acts over horsemeat scandal

Lancashire County Council has suspended the supply of all frozen processed beef products to schools as a precaution after its own scientific tests carried out in light of the horsemeat scandal cast further doubt on the reliability of food labelling.

The county council is one of the few councils in the country able to conduct its own laboratory tests on the DNA composition of meat products. It has chosen to test for traces of horsemeat in all the frozen processed beef products supplied to its schools, as well as undertaking work on the national investigation led by the Food Standards Agency.

Although the large majority of affected products on school menus have tested negative for horse DNA, two have tested positive. The first was a pre-prepared cottage pie used in 10% of primary schools (announced earlier in February) and the second was a Halal beef burger, which had been available at four schools in the county. All affected schools have been contacted and informed.

Frozen processed beef products only make up a small proportion of the menu, as most school meals are prepared using fresh beef from a local supplier, so pupils will continue to have a wide range of food to choose from. The suspended products were only supplied to secondary schools and around 10% of Lancashire's primary schools.

County Councillor Geoff Driver, Leader of Lancashire County Council, said: "I hope that parents and children can be reassured by the advice that this isn't a food safety issue, however it is frankly appalling that we have found horsemeat in two products which were supposedly 100 percent beef.

"These products came from manufacturers who not only carry all the correct certification but who also recently provided us with written assurances their products did not contain horsemeat.

"Few if any local councils across the country have been as proactive as we have in testing their school meals and unfortunately the results show we were right to act on the concerns raised by what has become an international scandal.

"Under the circumstances, with children returning from their half term break today, we feel we have no choice but to withdraw all frozen processed beef products as a precaution until the food industry and regulators do something to restore confidence in what people are being fed."

Changes to the county council's school meals menu will take place with immediate effect from today, Monday 25 February, when most schools are returning from holiday. All frozen products that contain processed beef will be taken off the menu.

The county council has undertaken a wide variety of tests for horse DNA in meat products at its Preston laboratory, reporting the results to the Food Standards Agency.

The first product supplied to schools that was found to contain horsemeat was a cottage pie, announced earlier in February. The second was a Halal beefburger. The affected schools have been made aware of the test results and, as a precaution, the council has also suspended a halal lamb burger, manufactured on the same premises as the beefburger, from its menu.

John Freeman at { [HYPERLINK "http://virtual-lancaster.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/county-council-acts-over-horsemeat.html?m=1"](http://virtual-lancaster.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/county-council-acts-over-horsemeat.html?m=1) }
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