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## Beef Producers Dispute 'Meat Glue' Safety Allegations

By Stephanie Armour - May 8, 2012

Beef producers said the depiction of meat glue by consumer activists is unfair and the industry's practice of using transglutaminase to bind pieces of meat into a single cut is safe.

The American Meat Institute, a Washington-based trade group that includes Cargill Inc. and [Tyson Foods Inc. \(TSN\)](#), released information showing how transglutaminase is used in dairy, seafood and baked goods as well as in beef for texture or to bind cuts together. Transglutaminase is an enzyme sold for almost two decades and has inaccurately been nicknamed meat glue for "shock appeal," the group said yesterday in a statement.

"Someone gave it a catchy name, so now it's catching on," Jeremy Russell, a spokesman with the [National Meat Association](#), another industry lobbying group, said in an interview.

The industry is trying to gain control of the debate over transglutaminase after a public backlash earlier this year over ammonia-treated beef scraps that consumer activists dubbed "pink slime" led to lost business for Beef Products Inc. and other companies. California state Senator Ted Lieu, a Democrat, last week [called](#) for a U.S. Agriculture Department investigation into transglutaminase because of potential contamination risks.

"Food suppliers, restaurants, and banquet facilities should not be deceiving the public into thinking they are eating a whole steak if, in fact, the steak was glued together from various meat parts," Lieu said in a letter to the agency.

### Consumer Deception

He said in an interview yesterday that it would be unfair for consumers to pay the

same for meat pieced together as they would for steak from one cow.

"I just don't think consumers should be paying more," he said.

Packaged meat products made with transglutaminase must be labeled as formed or reformed, the [American Meat Institute](#) said. The group said it's unaware of any food safety issues.

Consumer groups say sticking together cuts from different animals to form a muscle meat increases the chances of E. coli or other contamination. Comments slamming the practice have been popping up on Twitter and Facebook following news stories.

"It's consumer deception," said Michael Hansen, a senior scientist with Yonkers, New York-based [Consumers Union](#), which publishes [Consumer Reports](#). "When you see a muscle cut, you think it comes from one animal, not a jigsaw from a number of sources."

## Meat Contamination

Exterior contamination on a single cut of beef is often destroyed during cooking, according to Consumers Union. By piecing together meat with the enzyme, exterior contamination may get inside the final product and may not be killed if the meat is served rare or medium rare, Lieu said in his letter.

"Proper cooking is recommended for all raw beef products, but there's not a contamination issue," said Russell, with the [National Meat Association](#).

In addition to the spotlight on meat glue and pink slime, the U.S. industry last month was struck by its first case of mad cow disease in six years. [Indonesia](#) suspended meat imports after the U.S. reported the disease in a California dairy cow, prompting cattle futures on April 24 to tumble to a nine-month low.

A petition drive in March against pink slime, or lean finely textured ground beef, caused demand for ground beef to drop to the lowest amount for that month in a decade.