

Govt proposes clearer labeling of meat additives

July 21 2011, By MARY CLARE JALONICK , Associated Press

(AP) -- The Agriculture Department wants consumers to know when there's less chicken in their chicken.

A proposed rule aimed at [food companies](#) would require that poultry and other raw meats be labeled appropriately when they're plumped up by added solutions such as chicken broth, teriyaki sauce, salt or water. The practice of adding those ingredients is common, but many consumers don't know about it.

According to USDA, about one-third of poultry, 10 percent of beef and 90 percent of pork may have added ingredients - about 40 percent of all raw, whole cuts of meat. The rule does not apply to [ground beef](#), which may have other added substances.

"Consumers should be able to make an informed choice in the store, which is why we need to provide clear, informative labels that will help consumers make the best decisions about feeding their families," said Elisabeth Hagen, head of food safety at the department. "It has become evident that some [raw meat](#) and poultry labels, even those that follow our current guidelines, may not be clear."

Labels now say that the meat contains added solutions or is "enhanced," but they may not be visible to consumers or understandable. If the rules are finalized, the label would now have to be part of the product title. An example of the new labels would be "chicken breast - 40% added solution of water and teriyaki sauce," according to USDA.

Richard Lobb of the National Chicken Council says the [poultry industry](#) is split on the issue, as some companies add ingredients to their poultry and some don't. He said the level of added ingredients in poultry is generally 15 to 18 percent of the piece of meat.

[Red meat](#) processors immediately objected to the rule. The American Meat Institute called it "wasteful" and "unnecessary" and said it would cause prices to go up for consumers.

[Consumer groups](#) have been pressuring the department to crack down on the practice for several years, saying the added ingredients are unhealthy.

"Who wants to pay \$4.99 a pound for the added water and salt?" said Michael Jacobson, executive director of the advocacy group Center for Science in the Public Interest. "Besides cheating customers financially, 'enhancing' meat and poultry delivers a stealth hit of sodium."

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