

Meat 2.0? Clean meat? Spat shows the power of food wording

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This Jan 9, 2018 photo shows the Impossible Burger at Stella's, in Bellevue, Neb., which is a burger is made from plant protein. What gets to be considered "meat" is a particularly touchy subject as startups push to alter American eating habits with substitutes they say are just like the real thing. Impossible Burger's plant-based patty "bleeds" like beef. (Ryan Soderlin/The World-Herald via AP, File)

If meat is grown in a lab without slaughtering animals, what should it be

called?

That question has yet to be decided by regulators, but for the moment it's pitting animal rights advocates and others against cattle ranchers in a war of words.

Supporters of the science are embracing "clean meat" to describe meat grown by replicating animal cells. Many in the conventional meat industry are irritated by the term and want to stamp it out before it takes hold.

"It implies that traditional beef is dirty," says Danielle Beck, director of government affairs for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

The spat shows the power of language as a new industry attempts to reshape eating habits. It's why the \$49.5 billion U.S. beef, poultry, pork and lamb industry is mobilizing to claim ownership of the term "meat."

Squabbles over language are erupting across the food business as established definitions for mayonnaise and milk are also challenged by the likes of vegan spreads and almond drinks.

What gets to be considered "meat" is a particularly touchy subject as new companies come up with substitutes they say are just like the real thing.

Impossible Burger's plant-based patty "bleeds" like beef.

Companies such as Memphis Meats are growing meat by culturing animal cells, though it could be years before products are on shelves. Big meat producers like Tyson Foods and Cargill Inc. are among Memphis Meats' investors.

There's some confusion over how meat grown by culturing animal cells will be regulated. The U.S. Department of Agriculture oversees meat inspections, while the Food and Drug Administration oversees other aspects of food safety, including the "standards of identity" that spell out what ingredients can go into products with specific names.

The FDA—which in the past has called out Kraft's use of the term "pasteurized process cheese food"—plans to hold a public meeting to discuss "cultured" meat next month.

In the meantime, all sides are scrambling to frame the issue in their own words.

The Good Food Institute, an advocacy and lobbying group for meat alternatives, is embracing "clean meat," which channels the positive connotations of "clean energy." Other options it tested: "Meat 2.0," "Safe Meat" and "Pure Meat."

"Green Meat" was dismissed early on. "Nobody wants to eat green meat," said Bruce Friedrich, co-founder of the Good Food Institute.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association is fighting to defend what it sees as its linguistic turf.

"Our marching orders were to protect beef nomenclature," says Beck.

The cattlemen's group prefers less appetizing terms such as "in vitro meat," "synthetic meat" or even "meat byproduct" for meat grown through cultured cells.

For meat alternatives more broadly, it likes "fake meat."

The U.S. Cattlemen's Association, a smaller group, also petitioned the

USDA in February to enforce that "beef" and "meat" only be used for animals "born, raised and harvested in the traditional manner."

And in October, the former head of the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance considered a way to possibly halt the use of "clean meat" after hearing the term.

"You will see that we left the conference and immediately investigated the term 'Clean Meat' from a trademark perspective," wrote Randy Krotz, then-CEO of the group, according to an email obtained through a public records request by Property of the People, which advocates for government transparency.

Krotz noted that another party had already applied for the trademark, but said the alliance was able to claim the Twitter handle "@clean_meat." That account does not show any activity.

Anne Curzan, a professor of English at the University of Michigan, says the term "clean [meat](#)" highlights the positive and pushes into the background aspects that may make people uncomfortable.

"It is smart branding to try to keep the product from being associated with 'frankenfood'," Curzan says.

It's just the latest front in the war of words in food.

Last year, the dairy industry revived its quest to abolish terms like "soy milk" and "almond milk," saying that milk is defined as being obtained from a cow. That came after a vegan spread provoked the ire of the Association for Dressings and Sauces, of which Hellmann's is a member, by calling itself "Just Mayo."

Even grains aren't immune from controversy. With cauliflower "rice"

becoming popular with low-carb eaters, the rice industry is punching back with its own term for chopped-up vegetable substitutes: "rice pretenders."

A look at how "cultured" meat works

A new term is causing heartburn for beef, chicken and pork producers: "Clean meat."

The term is being used by supporters of the emerging science of meat grown in labs without slaughtering cows and chickens. But many in the conventional meat industry don't want it to become the accepted moniker, saying it implies that the meat they produce isn't clean.

Meat products grown by replicating animal cells are not yet on supermarket shelves, but the topic is getting enough attention that the Food and Drug Administration is holding a public meeting on "cultured" meat next month. The agency notes the technological considerations for these products are "complex and evolving." One challenge is making sure the cells replicate the animal cells correctly, the agency says.

Here's an overview of how the science works:

A sample of animal cells is taken and replicated using a culture that fosters their growth.

The FDA says animal cells can currently be produced from "starter cells" in machines where the cells are cultured to grow. Now companies are working to commercialize the process with techniques that allow complex tissues to form, the FDA says, similar to strategies being explored for human organ replacement.

Cultures provide nutrients, vitamins and minerals to help cells grow, but

the ones currently on the market are too costly for commercially viable products, according to the Good Food Institute, which advocates and lobbies for meat alternatives. Companies are working on lower-cost alternatives, says Matt Ball, a spokesman for the Good Food Institute. Certain types of meat are also more structurally complicated.

"None of these companies are at the point where they're producing marbled cuts of meat that have intricate three-dimensional structures," Ball says.

The advocacy group says establishing a supply chain will be critical for commercialization, particularly for the ingredients that go into the culture and other materials.

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