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EDUCATION

Yosemite Unified issues recall of beef

By Earlene Ward / Special To The Sierra Star

(Updated Wednesday, February 20, 2008, 12:46 PM)

All beef products were removed from Yosemite Unified School District's cafeteria menus Friday, Feb. 1, following the United States Department of Agriculture's announcement that one of the main suppliers of beef to federal food and nutrition programs was being investigated for "inhumane handling of non-ambulatory disabled cattle in a federally inspected slaughter establishment," according to Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer.

Irene Keener, director of food services for YUSD, immediately pulled all beef products from school menus. The USDA put an administrative hold on ground beef and "Bulk Beef Coarse" products produced by the supplier between Jan. 1 and Jan. 30.

The California Department of Education also recommended that school cafeterias place all commodity beef products on hold until further instructions from the USDA.

Keener said YUSD would be using chicken and turkey in the place of beef. Although the hold was only for ground beef and "Bulk Beef Coarse," Keener said the district would not be serving any beef products from the vendor under investigation until further notice from the USDA.

She said there are three freezers full of beef in the district cafeterias and she does not know if they will be reimbursed for the loss. However, she emphasized that money is not a concern, just the health and well-being of the children they serve.

Keener said Feb. 1 was a very difficult day for her and the food service staff.

"I am totally consumed with the responsibility of feeding this many children," she said. "We try so hard to do everything right. We don't cut corners, we work hard to be sure the food we give the children is healthy and won't harm them."

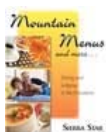
Keener said she's not sure she will ever really feel comfortable serving beef from that vendor again. "I had felt comfortable in the past because it was from a USDA-inspected plant," she said.

In a prepared statement, Secretary Shafer said the USDA had indefinitely suspended the vendor as a supplier to Federal food and nutrition programs. He said the suspension will remain in effect until all investigations are complete and appropriate action is taken by the department.

Earlene Ward is employed with the Yosemite Unified School District and teaches journalism at Yosemite High School.



Published every
Wednesday!



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