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...ving consumers a choice?

The chemical industry wants you to believe that the synthetic growth hormone is the same as the natural growth hormone in cows, but it is not. The synthetic growth hormone is produced by genetically engineering bacteria which makes the cow produce more milk for a longer period of time than its natural hormone cycle.

...years. During 1987-1989 taxpayers paid over $500 million each year to purchase surplus milk.

The 1990 Federal Farm Law now makes farmers responsible for the costs of buying surplus milk. Dairy farmers pay an assessment for government purchase of excess dairy products. This tax increases as the surplus increases. All dairy farmers must pay this assessment whether or not they increase their own production of milk with the use of the synthetic growth hormone.

Increased milk supply is assured with the introduction of the synthetic growth hormone. In fact, this is what the chemical producers use as the biggest selling point. The increase in milk production will increase the surplus.

Consumers promise that the use of the synthetic growth hormone will lead to a decrease in the consumption of dairy products, which will also increase the surplus. The increased production of milk will end up costing farmers and taxpayers plenty to buy up the surplus.

The FDA approval of this chemical is another bad decision in the flawed federal dairy policy. There is no need for this technology and it makes no sense. There is no benefit to the consumer, the farmer or the cows. In fact, there is substantial evidence to the contrary. Indeed, it is likely that the only groups to benefit from the approval of the synthetic growth hormone are the chemical and pharmaceutical companies who sell it: Monsanto; Upjohn; American Cyanamid; and Elanco, a division of Eli Lilly.

In the final analysis we must be cautious when the FDA and the chemical companies say the use of this synthetic growth hormone is safe and beneficial. After all, the FDA approved the use of the chemicals thalidomide, DDT and alar with the urging of the chemical industry.

In the meantime, the FDA must not allow the economic interest of the chemical companies to be an obstacle to consumer choice.

Right now the FDA policy permits dairy products that come from cows not injected with synthetic growth hormone to say so on the label. The FDA recently stated that it is aware of the public desire to know whether a dairy product is from cows injected with the synthetic hormone.

But the chemical industry does not want consumers to know which dairy products come from cows injected with the synthetic hormone. So the FDA is under pressure from the chemical industry to reconsider the labeling policy.

Citizens should let the FDA know that they want their government to listen and not ignore their concerns: dairy products, whether produced with or without the synthetic growth hormone, must be labeled.

Call Michelle Smith, FDA Office for Food Labeling, 202-205-5099, or Shelly Davis, FDA Office of Plants, Dairy Foods and Beverages 202-205-4681, to remind the FDA that consumers want a choice.

Charlene LaVoie is Winsted's community lawyer.