

# SAFE FOOD COALITION

1424 16<sup>th</sup> St, NW, Suite 604, Washington, DC 20036 202-387-6121

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February 25, 2013

Craig Wilson, Vice President  
Quality Assurance and Food Safety  
Costco  
P.O. Box 34331  
Issaquah, WA 98124

Transmitted via facsimile: 425-313-8591

Dear Mr. Wilson:

The signatories to this letter are members of the Safe Food Coalition and we would like to express our appreciation to you and Costco for taking the initiative to label steaks and other “intact” beef products sold in your stores that have been mechanically tenderized – with instructions to cook the meat to 160 degrees.

As you may know, the Safe Food Coalition has long advocated for USDA to require such a label for mechanically tenderized meat products. Research has demonstrated that foodborne pathogens found on the surface of intact meat products can be driven into the interior of those products as a result of the mechanical tenderization process. Mechanically tenderized meat products must therefore be cooked to a higher internal cooking temperature to ensure the destruction of those pathogens. At the present time, there is no requirement that mechanically tenderized meat products carry special food handling instructions thus leaving consumers vulnerable to potential foodborne illness.

USDA has sent a proposed rule on this issue to the White House Office of Management and Budget for review. We hope that the proposed rule is released soon so that the public comment period can proceed and a meaningful rule can be finalized in the near future. Meanwhile, the voluntary action taken by Costco demonstrates that there is recognition by responsible industry leaders of this potential public health hazard and that there is willingness by industry to address it.

Again, thank you very much for your leadership on this issue. We look forward to working with you as rulemaking on this matter moves forward.

Sincerely,

Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Consumer Federation of America

Consumers Union

Food & Water Watch

National Consumers League

STOP Foodborne Illness