

FDA seeks consumer comment on plant-based dairy substitutes

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb has taken the first step in his intention to enforce the agency’s standard of identity for dairy products, addressing the labeling of plant-based foods with dairy terms.

FDA has concerns the labeling of those products might lead consumers to believe they have the same key nutritional attributes as dairy products, he said in issuing a request for information in the Federal Register on Sept. 27.

Those products are sometimes packaged similarly to dairy products and sold in the dairy section of grocery stores, he said.

“However, these plant-based products may not be satisfactory



Associated Press File
FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb is seeking information on the nutritional content of plant-based drinks that label themselves “milk.”

substitutes for all uses of dairy. And some may not be nutritionally equivalent,” he said in a press statement.

“We’re interested to know if consumers are aware of and understand the nutritional characteristics and differences among these products — and between these products and dairy — when they make dietary choices for themselves and their families,” he said.

National Milk Producers Federation, which has long tried to get FDA to enforce its labeling regulations on imitation dairy products, welcomes the agency’s action.

Hopefully, FDA will finally curtail the misleading labeling practices of plant-based foods imitating real dairy products, Jim Mulhern, NMPF president and CEO, said in a press statement.

“We are pleased that after all these years of engagement with FDA, the agency is finally addressing our con-

cerns about how these plant-based products are inappropriately marketed to consumers,” he said.

FDA’s request for public comment recognizes many of the same issues NMPF has brought to light over the last four decades — that plant-based products are packaged, merchandized and sold in the same way as real dairy foods, yet provide fewer nutrients and therefore cannot be considered suitable substitutes, he said.

However, NMPF’s concerns are not just about nutritional equivalence and the implications for public health, he said.

“A standardized dairy food, like milk, yogurt or butter, is defined by its inherent characteristics including how and when it’s sourced and its sensory attributes and performance

properties,” he said.

The American Dairy Coalition also appreciates Gottlieb’s action.

“Consumers rely on product labels to form expectations of the products they purchase,” Laurie Fischer, the coalition’s CEO, told Capital Press.

It’s important to ensure consumers can quickly, clearly and accurately compare and contrast the nutritional content of the products they choose to feed their families, she said.

“While plant-based drinks may provide something that looks similar to dairy products, their nutritional content is far from equal,” she said.

In addition, a variety of other ingredients with unfamiliar names are routinely added to most of these alternative drinks, she said.

Australia, WSU work together on ag robotics

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — To speed robotic advancements that help farmers grow food with fewer resources, scientists at Washington State University and Australia’s University of Technology Sydney have partnered to form the new Joint Center for Agricultural Robotics.

The partnership joins WSU scientists’ expertise in innovative automation solutions for farms and orchards with pre-eminent research in robotics at the University of Technology Sydney’s (UTS) Centre for Autonomous Systems.

Through innovations like apple-picking robots, sensor-driven high efficiency irrigation systems and crop-sensing drones, discoveries in agricultural automation could boost productivity, save labor, conserve natural resources and reduce dependence on chemicals.

Australian scientists toured WSU’s Center for Precision and Automated Agricultural Systems and signed an agreement for the new joint center. The universities have been exchanging ideas and discussing collaboration since 2015.

The new center could spur team projects, joint workshops, conferences and publications, exchange of students and faculty and joint applications for funding.

FFA Ag Expo offers valuable lessons for young and old

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Now that the Meridian FFA Elementary Ag Expo has been around southwest Idaho for 11 years, many of the high school students giving instructions to first-graders remember what it was like to be on the receiving end.

Courtney Marshall, Meridian FFA reporter and event co-chair, recalls attending the expo at Meridian High School when she was in first grade.

“It was a huge highlight of our year,” she said.

The expo, a field trip for all first-graders in the West Ada School District, draws more than 3,000 students, plus their teachers and some parents. It also features an evening event for the public.

Introducing food production makes sense in first grade because students for the first time combine information-based and hands-on learning in a full school day, said Cassidey Plum, event chair and Meridian FFA chapter vice president.

“Agriculture is easily overlooked, but if you implement it in the classrooms at an early age, it will stay with them throughout their educational careers,” she said. Earlier, she gave a tour of the expo to Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom board members.

“All are excited,” Marshall said Sept. 25, the first day of the three-day expo.

Miriam Lott, who teaches first grade at Pioneer Elementary School, liked what she saw of the event and her students’ response.

“Because there is a lot to see, they are interested,” she



Brad Carlson/Capital Press
First-graders pet just-weaned pigs at the Meridian FFA Elementary Ag Expo Sept. 25 at Meridian, Idaho, High School.

said. “And they love animals. They love being able to see and interact with them.”

The expo benefits FFA students as well as visiting first-grade teachers, said Michelle Ball, who teaches agriculture at Meridian and Centennial high schools.

Teachers get material they can incorporate into lessons, and FFA students working in the expo learn skills not easily replicated in a classroom, she said. They include organizing and running the event, seeing a need and fulfilling it, teaching young students and advising and cooperating

with peers.

How to interact with and stay safe around the animals is continuously discussed with the first-grade students.

Marshall said FFA stu-

dents also must be ready to teach or even entertain first-graders for short periods, like when they are waiting in line to enter the main venue.

As for lessons the high school students learn in FFA and in class, “now they are actually able to apply it, pass it on and teach first-graders,” Ball said.



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