

John Bennett Creative Services *for Child Nutrition Professionals*

Below are some talking points you can use if you are asked by local media or other groups to comment on the beef recall situation. Look these points over carefully, and revise to fit your situation or call us for a revision, or further help.

Keep in mind that it is always acceptable, when a reporter calls, to tell him or her that you are taking care of something right now and to please give you a number to call back in just a few minutes. Then, gather your thoughts and composure, look over the talking points again, and call back promptly.

It's also acceptable to use the talking points when addressing the media as a group or individually. Get to know the material and try not to simply read, but use the points to refer to and keep yourself on track.

Finally, don't feel pressured to say more than you know or can accurately say. Stay "on message" and stick to the points below, even if you have to repeat key phrases, and resist the all-too-human urge to blather on. Say what you have to say and then stop – it's up to them to frame a new question, so don't let them use "the roaring silence" to get you to keep going kind of aimlessly.

Try to come off as accommodating and eager to help, rather than defensive or trying to hide something.

AND PLEASE – call or contact us if you need more extensive or specific help or preparation.

Talking points:

1. Let me first say that our primary commitment is always to the ***health and well-being of the children in our school system.***

Depending on your situation, go to one of the three versions of the next point below:

- 2a. We never received any of the beef in question**, so the recall does not affect us directly. Still, we understand that parents and students may well be concerned about the safety of school meals even if a school system, like ours, never received any of the meat.

I want to assure everyone in our community that we have always been and will always be vigilant, ***even obsessive***, about the safety of the food we serve to kids. We follow the strictest food safety standards and in the very rare event that we need to address a problem, we do so quickly and openly. Again, nothing is more important than the health and well-being of our kids.

OR

- 2b. We did receive some of the beef in question** and have withdrawn all of it from our supplies. I want to stress that none of the recalled beef has been found to be harmful or tainted in any way. And I want to assure everyone in our community that we have always been and will always be vigilant, ***even obsessive***, about the safety of the food we serve to kids. We follow the strictest food safety standards and in the very rare event that we need to address a problem, we do so quickly and

openly, as we have done here. Again, nothing is more important than the health and well-being of our kids.

OR

2c. As of right now, we are not sure if we received any of the beef in question. We're working with the (name of your state agency) and USDA to determine that for sure. Of course, if we find that we did receive any of the product, we will withdraw all of it from our supplies immediately. In the meantime, we will not prepare any meals using any of the beef we have on hand that we received through USDA, whether or not it was part of the recall. Also, I want to stress that none of the recalled beef has been found to be harmful or tainted in any way.

And I want to assure everyone in our community that we have always been and will always be vigilant, **even obsessive**, about the safety of the food we serve to kids. We follow the strictest food safety standards and in the very rare event that we need to address a problem, we do so quickly and openly, as we have done here. Again, nothing is more important than the health and well-being of our kids.

3. USDA recalled the beef because of serious violations of **procedures** by the processor in question. Like all Americans, we are distressed and upset about the revelations regarding this processor. The recall is what USDA calls a "Class Two" recall, meaning that none of the product has been found to be even potentially harmful.
4. We get most of our food from commercial processors, many of whom are local. Food from the USDA commodity program makes up only about XX% of the food we prepare and serve in our program, and we count

on USDA to monitor the processors of that food and to act when problems are found. I think this recall shows that USDA is ready to act decisively, and we commend them for taking this sweeping action.

5. Again, I want to stress that nothing – **NOTHING** – matters more to us than the health and well-being of our children. We're here to provide the nutrition kids need to learn well, and whenever a question about food safety comes up, we will always act **immediately** in the best interest of our kids.

NOTE: Be prepared to say how much product you received/withdrew. You may well get a specific question along those lines.