

# **J**ohn 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 LFTB situation. (Try to avoid using the loaded "pink slime" terminology.) This is a complicated and dense subject, and we've tried to simplify your response and emphasize the role that effective processing plays in controlling food-borne illness outbreaks.***

***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.***
2. Here are the facts of this situation. For the last 20 years, the FDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service has allowed beef processors to use a small percentage of so-called "Lean Finely Textured Beef" (LFTB), which has been processed with ammonium hydroxide. Ground beef containing LFTB is used in commercial ground beef sold in stores, used in restaurants, and provided to institutional food service operations, including school food service programs. About 75% of the ground beef patties sold in the U.S. contain LFTB. Commercial patties contain up to 25% LFTB, but ground beef distributed by USDA contains much less than that, an average of about 6.5% LFTB. The LFTB process actually makes our food – and our kids' food at school -- ***safer, not less safe, by eliminating deadly E. coli bacteria.***
3. Ammonia and ammonia hydroxide are used in processing myriad food products, including baked goods, cheeses, chocolates, condiments, relishes, protein concentrates, snack foods, jams and jellies, and beverages. ***The use of ammonia in food processing is long-standing and safe.***
4. Ammonia is a compound of nitrogen and hydrogen that ***occurs naturally*** in all forms of plant and animal life, including in people. Each person produces about 4200mg of ammonia naturally every day.
5. Ammonia occurs naturally in beef, but very small additional amounts, in the form of puffs of ammonia hydroxide gas, are used in producing LFTB. Why? ***Because the gas effectively kills E. coli bacteria, which is the real threat to our kids' health.*** Any

unlikely residual ammonia in the beef evaporates with cooking, and wouldn't hurt you at any rate, whereas ***E. coli can kill you really fast.*** This process is a safe and efficient way to remove that potentially fatal threat.

6. Furthermore, no meat produced by the ammonium hydroxide method has "***ever been linked to any illnesses or outbreaks,***" according to the *New York Times*.
7. If a parent or family chooses to avoid ground beef for their kids from the store, at restaurants, and/or at school, ***we are very happy to provide meal choices that do not contain ground beef at all meals.***
7. 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, I want to stress that nothing – ***NOTHING*** – matters more to us than the health and well-being of our children.
8. ***[Don't bring this up voluntarily, but use it if necessary.]*** The term "pink slime" was popularized by a sensationalistic demonstration by the TV personality and provocateur Jamie Oliver two years ago. In a highly staged and cleverly edited segment, Oliver sloshed ammonia cleaning product from a gallon jug over a pan of beef trimmings and then put the resulting goo in a washing machine to "show" how LFTB is processed. This was done for shock and entertainment value and did not remotely recreate the actual process, in which lean, boneless beef trimmings are "puffed" by a small amount of ammonium hydroxide gas and then processed in a centrifuge to separate the remaining fat from the usable beef. ***The process, like the use of ammonia, is entirely safe and approved by the Food and Drug Administration.***