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From: Joe O'Connell
Sent: Thursday, July 26, 2001 9:05 PM
To: jameson@NIEHS.nih.gov
Subject: Regarding the Inclusion of HCAs in the NTP Report on Carcinogens

Dr. Jameson,

I am a member of the Southern California Barbecue Association, the Kansas City Barbeque Society, and other national organizations which promote the understanding and appreciation of authentic American barbecue. I live in California's 36th Congressional District and am represented by Senator Dianne Feinstein, Senator Barbara Boxer, and Congresswoman Jane Harmon. I am writing to express my concern that "human exposure information" regarding HCAs has been misreported.

At the request of National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and of Dr. Takashi Sugimura, President Emeritus, National Cancer Center of Japan, the National Toxicology Program (NTP) is considering the nomination of two heterocyclic amines (HCAs) to the Report on Carcinogens. These HCAs are formed during high-temperature cooking (such as grilling and frying), are found in cooked meat muscle (and apparently not in ground meat, like hamburger), and may be human carcinogens.

My concern lies with the description of the exposure and formation of HCAs, because scientists, the government and the media equate barbecue with grilling. Human exposure to these HCAs and their formation are described in press accounts as occurring "from barbecue". See, for example, the story in the Houston Chronicle of July 25, 2001, written by Seth Borenstein, which begins, "Barbecuers beware -- the latest item on the government's list of substances suspected of causing cancer is grilled meats." This and similar reports warn the public against "barbecue" but assure the public that charred hamburgers are safe. From these accounts, the public is likely

to conclude, incorrectly, that barbecue is risky but charred meat is safe, including hamburgers and even steak, since "if charred hamburger is safe, then charred steak must also be safe".

The fact is that barbecue and grilling are very different and virtually opposite cooking methods.

Barbecue is a very ancient method of slow cooking meat at low temperatures over wood coals. Five hundred years ago in pre-Columbian America, meat was cooked slowly and at a low temperature to smoke, dry, tenderize and preserve it. The method was taught by Native Americans to the earliest Spanish explorers around 1495. Even the word "barbecue" is itself a Native American word, from the Taino people of the Caribbean. Our first President, George Washington, wrote about his enjoyment of barbecue, which referred to an all-day celebration, including slowly cooking meat. Barbecue requires a low temperature -- around 212F, the boiling point of water -- and a slow cooking process over wood coals. It is described best as "low 'n slow".

Grilling, on the other hand, is a relatively new method of fast cooking at high temperatures, above 400F and often above 900F. It is a relatively new cooking method, because grilling requires tender cuts of meat, which became available only in the last century. Grilled steaks and hamburgers are not barbecued but grilled.

Because barbecue cooking requires many hours of slow cooking at low temperatures (in the range of 200F to 250F) from wood and wood coals, few members of the general public have ever tasted real barbecue. Instead, they believe that MacDonald's grilled McRibs and Tony Roma's grilled baby back ribs are barbecue.

If our government and media do not educate the public and clearly explain the difference between barbecue and grilling, then the public will be continue to be confused. In the case of these nominated HCAs, such confusion may lead tens of thousands of Americans to conclude incorrectly that barbecue is

dangerous but grilling is safe. As in the Houston Chronicle story, described above, people may come to believe that meat barbecued at low temperatures is dangerous, because it is "barbecued", yet meat charred at high temperatures is safe, because grilled ground meat (like hamburgers) contain few or no HCAs.

On behalf of those who know and love authentic American barbecue, I respectfully request that you use your good offices to ensure that any findings with respect to HCAs as carcinogens clearly state that HCAs are formed during the process of grilling meat and not during the process of barbecuing meat. Please use your best efforts to ensure that the media and public at large understand the fact that real barbecue, the only authentic American cuisine which was taught by our Native American ancestors, is a safe alternative to grilling.

Thank you for your assistance in this important matter.

With best regards,

Joe O'Connell
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