

US beef producer sues ABC News over 'pink slime' label

WASHINGTON, US: A major US beef producer sued ABC News on Thursday, claiming the network launched a "disinformation campaign" by calling its ground beef products "pink slime."

The company, Beef Products, Inc, filed suit for defamation against ABC and its team of journalists including Diane Sawyer, anchor for the flagship ABC World News, and correspondent Jim Avila.

The lawsuit seeks damages for "defamation, product and food disparagement, tortuous interference with business relationships, and other wrongs" allegedly committed by ABC News.

It says the broadcaster produced "nearly 200 false and disparaging statements regarding BPI and its product, 'lean, finely-textured beef'... in a month-long vicious, concerted disinformation campaign against BPI, companies that produced a safe, nutritious beef."

South Dakota-based BPI said it is a group of family-owned companies which together produce the largest amount of the product, LFTB, made from a process that gets more meat from each animal includes beef trimmings and other cuts of beef to make ground beef.

"BPI was an American success story," the complaint said. "BPI was able to produce a lean beef that lowered the fat content of ground beef, lowered the cost of ground beef for consumers, and decreased the number of cattle slaughtered for lean beef production. BPI made a safe and nutritious product that was good for consumers, the beef industry and the environment."

It said that on 7 March, the fortunes of BPI were reversed by "a disinformation campaign against BPI and LFTB" which "manufactured a baseless consumer backlash against BPI and LFTB."

It said ABC "knowingly misled the public into believing that LFTB was not beef at all, but rather was an unhealthy 'pink slime' 'hidden' in ground beef... based on knowing or reckless misstatements of facts."

On the ABC News website, senior vice president Jeffrey Schneider was quoted as saying the lawsuit was "without merit."

"We will contest it vigorously," he was quoted as saying.

In April, Pennsylvania-based AFA Foods said it was forced to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection following media coverage of the same issue.

The product in question includes leftover bits of slaughtered cattle mixed in a centrifuge, then treated with a cloud of ammonia in a USDA-approved process intended to deter *E.coli* contamination.

Pink slime got its unflattering nickname from microbiologist Gerald Zirnstein, who as a USDA food inspector investigating a food bacteria outbreak in 2002 toured a beef products plant and recoiled at what he found.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge

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