

January 6, 2016

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**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Charles M. Hansen  
The Truthful Labeling Coalition  
(202) 550-6270 m  
[truthfullabeling@gmail.com](mailto:truthfullabeling@gmail.com)



**NEW STUDY CONFIRMS CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS FOR “NATURAL” MEAT AND POULTRY LABELS -- Consumers Don’t Believe Chicken Pumped With Added Saltwater Solutions Should Display A “Natural” Label**

WASHINGTON D.C., January 6, 2016 – New consumer research shows that most consumers look for “Natural” labels when they shop for groceries. However, fewer than half of those consumers trust “Natural” label claims on food products. The Truthful Labeling Coalition (TLC) is releasing a new consumer study confirming that almost 3 in 4 consumers believe that fresh chicken labeled “Natural” should not be pumped with added saltwater and seaweed extract solutions.

In 2004, several poultry processors persuaded USDA to begin allowing “Natural” labels on saltwater-pumped poultry. Today, USDA estimates that today about 25 percent of all ready-to-cook poultry products are so-called “enhanced” with added saltwater solutions, most of which goes unnoticed by the average consumer because of the “Natural” label. Despite a chorus of criticism, including a 2004 report from the National Institute of Standards and Technology that found the labeling was “ineffective at best, and misleading at worst,” USDA has not tightened its rules on “Natural” labels.

For the last seven years, the Truthful Labeling Coalition has fought for clear and truthful labeling on USDA-inspected meat and poultry products. In December 2014, USDA finalized a rule that will require improved labeling of so-called “enhanced” meat and poultry products. However, USDA is still allowing these saltwater-enhanced products to carry the “Natural” label. It was common practice in the industry to use “enhanced” to describe products pumped with up to 15 percent saltwater; however it’s the use of “Natural” on the label of these products that’s at issue. This is because saltwater vastly increases the sodium content of the meat and poultry. For example, one serving of chicken without the added saltwater should contain only about 60 mg of sodium. Pumped full of saltwater, that same serving can have as much as 400 mg of sodium. In addition to creating obvious health concerns for many, saltwater also increases the weight, so that consumers pay more. One study found that consumers are spending almost \$2 billion every year for all of the added saltwater weight.

“Consumers purchasing fresh, all natural, chicken believe it is a healthy choice,” said Charles Hansen, on behalf of the Truthful Labeling Coalition. “They don’t expect to find high sodium levels in fresh chicken, nor do they expect to pay for that hidden saltwater weight as part of the overall package price.”

The new study shows that consumers want USDA to put a stop to this misleading “Natural” labeling on saltwater-pumped products.

“These findings show that consumers expect much more from ‘Natural’ claims on grocery store shelves,” said Lampkin Butts, President and Chief Operating Office of Sanderson Farms, a TLC member company. “It’s imperative for USDA to act on this important rule. American consumers have already waited far too long.”

Other key findings from the new consumer study:

- 65 percent of consumers look for “Natural” labels when doing their grocery shopping.
- Only 44 percent of consumers trust “Natural” labels on food products.
- 78 percent of consumers do not expect fresh chicken labeled “Natural” to contain any added solutions.
- 77 percent of consumers agreed that third-party verification of label claims would increase their level of trust.

Committed to the truthful labeling of fresh chicken, the TLC has led an aggressive campaign to urge the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to allow only 100 percent natural chicken, with no additives such as saltwater or seaweed extract, to be labeled as “100% All Natural.” The Truthful Labeling Coalition (TLC) is a coalition of truly natural chicken producers and over thirty thousand grassroots citizens in all fifty states. For more information, please go to <http://www.truthfullabeling.org>.