RMAA PRESS RELEASE :

THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT AND THE ABATTOIR INDUSTRY

BACKGROUND

The Consumer Protection Act (Act 68 of 2008) was promulgated on 24 April 2009 and was signed into law by outgoing President Kgalema Motlanthe.

The Consumer Protection Act came into effect to promote a fair, accessible and sustainable market place for consumer products and services.

The preamble to this Act also recognizes recent and emerging technological changes which will bring new benefits, opportunities and challenges for consumer goods and services in South Africa.

The Consumer Protection Act inter alia
- promotes and protects the economic interests of consumers
- improves access to information necessary for consumers to make informed choices
– protects consumers from hazards to their well being and safety.

Consumers have the right to be protected against discriminatory marketing which includes the supply of different quality goods or prices charged. Similarly a producer may not market goods in a manner that is reasonably likely to imply a false or misleading representation as to the nature or properties of the product.
The Act however also has as an objective to promote responsible consumer behavior.

THE PROVISION OF GUARANTEES ON MEAT SAFETY

The Meat Safety Act (Act 40 of 2000) and the Red Meat Regulations provide for comprehensive measures to promote the safety of red meat. In addition to the Act, the Hygiene Management System which is provided for in Section III of the regulations, provide for documentation which serve as proof of the continued compliance of the abattoir to appropriate food safety requirements.

Compliance to these requirements will allow a registered abattoir to sell meat fit for human consumption. It follows that every effort must be made by the registered abattoir owner to comply with the legal requirements and to follow a diligent procedure in handling non-conformances which are disclosed from internal control measures or regulatory or other audits conducted on the premises.

The sale of meat, derived from an illegal slaughter, will imply a false representation of the nature of the product!

In essence the legislation provides for suppliers to act fairly and reasonably in their dealings with consumers!

A CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE

Disease outbreaks have not resulted in the reduced consumption of meat, but have certainly increased the awareness of consumers worldwide. In South Africa, food poisoning outbreaks are not recognized, reported and reacted on in the same way as in other first world countries. This is mainly due to poor reporting and epidemiological investigation of food borne illnesses.

In view of the Consumer Protection Act, South African food companies should assimilate the valuable lessons learnt by the Americans during disease (food poisoning) outbreaks over the past decade ie. that

- A company's reputation cannot be insured
- Food safety management systems provide a company with excellent marketing info
- It pays to be pro active
- Making food safe should be the first and not an additional requirement
- Jurors, legal representatives and the press are never unbiased in food safety investigations and trials....they are consumers too?!!

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