

*In-Depth Reporting on Issues Connecting Our Region to the Global Community*

## A World Without Hemp Foods

By Angela Starks

Edited by Lorna Tychostup

*Why Should We Care?*

*If people let government decide what foods they eat and what medicines they take, their bodies will soon be in as sorry a state as are the souls of those who live under tyranny.*  
—Thomas Jefferson

It's no passing fad or trendy new health product; the use of hemp as food is an age-old practice that has been rediscovered for its nutritional benefit. For thousands of years, hemp seed has been the most continuously used human—and sometimes animal—food crop around the world. It is also the oldest. The Chinese were eating hemp as far back as 8,000 years ago and early Greek writings speak of its consumption. European monks were once required to eat the seeds in porridge or soups three times a day, and they have long been a staple in Russia where they are ground to make a butter and eaten as gruel. Until the 1950s, mothers of the Sotho tribe in South Africa served ground hemp seeds with either bread or corn meal to children during weaning. Hemp has even saved many populations in time of famine, when few other foods would grow.

Today, many health food stores sell hemp seed oil, candy bars with whole hemp seeds in them, and hulled seeds that are eaten like nuts. The seeds can also be processed very much like soybeans for use as a milk substitute and other dairy-like products.

Yet, because of the confusion between hemp and marijuana, this highly nutritious food has come under attack. A recent ruling and clarification of the law by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has called for the removal of many hemp foods from American store shelves, giving February 6 as the deadline to destroy or remove the products from the US altogether. Currently, it is against the law to sell most hemp foods for human consumption. What is the reasoning behind these draconian measures? And why should we, the public, really care? Whether we consume hemp foods ourselves or not, there is a human rights issue involved when a government makes it illegal to eat an ancient, harmless food. Not to mention the loss of the health benefits of hemp seed based on its unique and valuable nutritional profile.

Hemp and marijuana are both classified as separate parts of the same plant species known as cannabis. Under federal law, Congress defines marijuana as those parts of the cannabis plant that are the source of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the substance in marijuana that causes the psychoactive effect or “high”.



*Ken Halpern of Earthgoods with an assortment of soon-to-be-outlawed hemp products*

The marijuana portions of the cannabis plant include the flowering tops, leaves, and resin. The remainder—stalks and seeds—are more commonly known as hemp. While most of the THC in cannabis plants is concentrated in the marijuana, all parts of the plant, including hemp, have been found to contain at least some traces of THC. Unfortunately for hemp food eaters, THC is listed in the same category as heroin—as a “Schedule 1 controlled substance”—and federal law prohibits human consumption and possession of Schedule 1 controlled substances.

On October 9 of last year, the DEA published a set of rules that explain which hemp products are legal. Whether a product is illegal will depend on whether the product causes THC to enter the human body. If it does, it is an illegal substance that may not be manufactured, sold or consumed in the United States. Such products include hemp foods and beverages that are found to contain THC, for example: hemp oil, hemp flour, and hemp “burgers”. Sometimes the label on a product may carry a statement such as: “Do not consume if you are subject to drug screening.” Permitted in the category of lawful hemp products, at least for now, are textiles and personal care products such as lotions and shampoos provided it is not discovered that they cause THC to be absorbed into the bloodstream via the skin. Birdseed mixtures are also allowed, provided the seed has been sterilized so that no plants can be grown from them.

Some manufacturers and retailers have inventories of hemp food and beverages intended for human consumption, so the DEA is providing a “grace period.” As set forth in the rules, any person who currently possesses illegal THC-containing hemp products will have until February 6, 2002 to dispose of them or remove them from the US. As mentioned earlier, during this grace period, no person is permitted to manufacture or sell these products.

Since hemp products constitute only a small percentage of their merchandise, most local health food stores do not foresee any significant loss of business should they be banned entirely.

“The people who will be affected are the people who choose to purchase these products on a regular basis,” says Frank Mazzarone, the supplements manager and buyer at the Health and Nutrition Center in New Paltz. “[People]

should be allowed to consume what they want to. So, our store won't suffer financially, but I'm very opposed to the ban from a philosophical and moral perspective."

"The government agencies should take a long, hard look at what they are doing," says Ken Halpern, owner of Earthgoods Natural Foods store in New Paltz. "It boils down to one thing: have they got nothing better to do? Instead, they should be focusing on things like food additives and genetically engineered ingredients instead of something so harmless. Somebody needs to remind them that hemp food is not a drug!"

Halpern has found that some of their distributors are already ceasing to stock hemp food products. "There's a rumor that whole shipments are being seized, and just being left at the dock." In addition to a range of hemp body care products, EarthGoods sells numerous hemp foods, including candy bars, flour, seeds, nut butter and chips.

Bob Whitcomb, owner of Sunflower Natural Foods store in Woodstock, likewise believes that "it seems foolish to waste so much energy on trying to ban these foods. We sell a number of these products because there's a call for it. Hemp is a nutritious food with no drug effect as far as I can tell."

**From now on, even if you eat one hemp seed with the most insignificant trace of THC, you will technically be breaking the law.**

Reading over the DEA's regulations ([www.dea.gov/advisories/pal100901.html](http://www.dea.gov/advisories/pal100901.html)) it becomes clear that this is a ban on the THC in hemp seed foods, not a ban on hemp seed foods themselves. "THC is an hallucinogenic substance with a high potential for abuse," they warn. However, unlike the effects from smoking marijuana, you would have to consume several hundred pounds of seed in just a few minutes in order to detect even the slightest high.

So why ban hemp foods based on their content of THC?

Over the past few years, hoping to have their results excused, hundreds of people have blamed their failing of watchdog drug tests on their supposed ingestion of hemp seed products, according to a Hemp Food Association (HFA) October press release. The HFA states that "the drug testing industry became quite alarmed at what they termed the 'drug test interference' defense raised by these folks and their lawyers. So the DEA responded by banning THC in hemp seed products."

(When asked for a response, a spokesperson from the DEA's Public Affairs Office could say only that he had not seen any evidence or formal documentation that would support the HFA's assertion. Also, he emphasized that the DEA's recently published rulings are not a new ban on hemp foods, but rather a clarification of laws that were already in existence in regards to controlled substances. The DEA maintains that an illegal substance is illegal even in minute quantities that can occur in hemp foods.)

Although it is impossible for the hemp seed itself to contain any THC within it, resin from the flowering tops of the plant often sticks to the outside of the seed's oat. That is how some hemp seed foods can cause consumers to test positive for marijuana in the extremely sensitive urine tests. Hemp seeds that have the offending outer shells removed, such as the HempNut brand (who make packets of hempseed that you can eat like nuts), are far less likely to cause one to test positive. If you have to pee in a cup for your boss or the government, look for hemp seed foods that at least claim to be THC-free. It is likely that such products will be appearing on the shelves in response to the DEA's "zero tolerance" to THC. By using hemp plants that have been selectively bred, manufacturers may be able to prove that they have no traces of THC in their foods. "No customer should have to risk jail or loss of a career just by consuming healthy hemp seed foods, so removing all THC is important to responsible hemp seed product marketers," states the HFA press release.

Expecting the government ban for some time, the hemp food industry has developed the technology to provide "zero THC" hemp seed and hemp seed-based products. "Improving processing standards to meet challenges in today's market is the only way to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of the hemp seed products industry," says the HFA. "Responsible hemp seed importers have met this challenge." But they also add: "Unreasonable fear about THC is holding back the hemp seed industry's very ability to be sustainable and viable."

Hemp foods have been central to so many cultures the world over, yet only a small percentage of people in America currently buy these products. Some researchers believe this is due to decades of US government and media misunderstanding and misinformation about hemp's benefits and its association with pot smoking. (For a thorough exploration of this issue—including documentation

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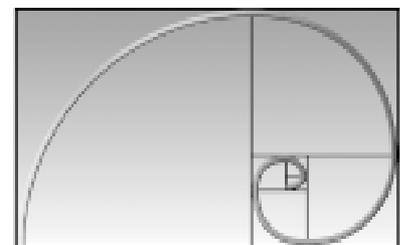
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Lorna Tychostup

of the cotton and petrochemical industry's desire to sideline hemp because it can replace their products, and the use of the THC issue as a smokescreen—read *The Emperor Wears No Clothes*, by Jack Herer.)

Yet, hemp seed is one of the most nutritious foods known, and is especially valuable for its high content of essential fatty acids (EFAs). These fats are crucial to the proper functioning of all our bodily systems. In fact, hemp seed has the highest concentration of EFAs—at 80 percent of total oil volume—found in any food on the planet. In hemp seeds, the two EFAs called Omega 3 and Omega 6 are found in the ratio that most nutritionists agree is ideal for the body's needs. Dr. Udo Erasmus, the leading authority on edible fats and oils, calls hemp seed oil "nature's most perfectly balanced oil." EFA deficiency can result in neurological disorders, impaired vision, high blood pressure, hormonal imbalance, poor immunity, low fertility, dry skin and impaired wound healing.

Its high quality protein is another reason to safeguard hemp seed, with its full complement of all eight essential amino acids in a balanced proportion. Hemp seeds also contain a higher percentage of globular edistin (a highly digestible protein which also facilitates digestion) than any other plant.

Just a handful of hemp seeds also provides many vitamins, providing especially good percentages of our daily requirements for vitamin B1 and vitamin D, and contain a good amount of calcium.

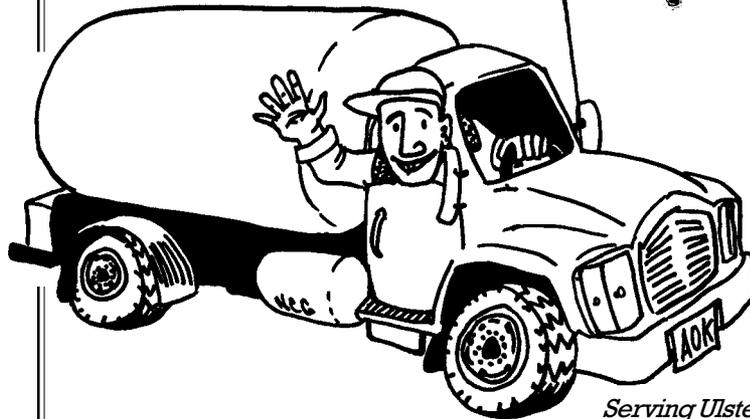
In order for us to legally continue to reap the benefits of hemp, the HFA cites the need for domestically grown drug-free hemp, but this may depend on public pressure. "An effective way to support the fledgling hemp industry is by voting with your dollars," they advise on their Web site [www.hempfood.com](http://www.hempfood.com). "Encourage others to seek out and buy these highly nutritious hemp seed products. Tell friends and family about them. Encourage their use. This is the greatest power consumers and citizens have, to vote with their dollars as well as their ballots."

The HFA also recommends writing the DEA to let them know that it's a bad idea to regulate even further one of the already most strictly regulated industries in the US.

But the DEA seems to have already made up its mind that there are "only two ways that THC may lawfully enter a person's body." According to the regulations, these are: "First, if the person is using a drug product that has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as being safe and effective for human use. Second, if the person is a research subject in clinical research that has been approved by FDA..." Therefore, from now on, even if you eat one hemp seed with the most insignificant trace of THC, you will technically be breaking the law.

The period for public comment on the DEA regulations closed on December 10, 2001; but it is still worth registering your opinion. Write to: Office of Diversion Control, Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington, DC 20537; or call (202) 307-7183 for further information. ■

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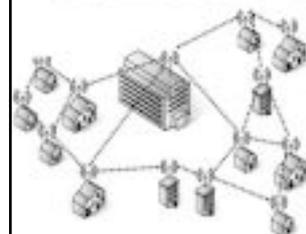
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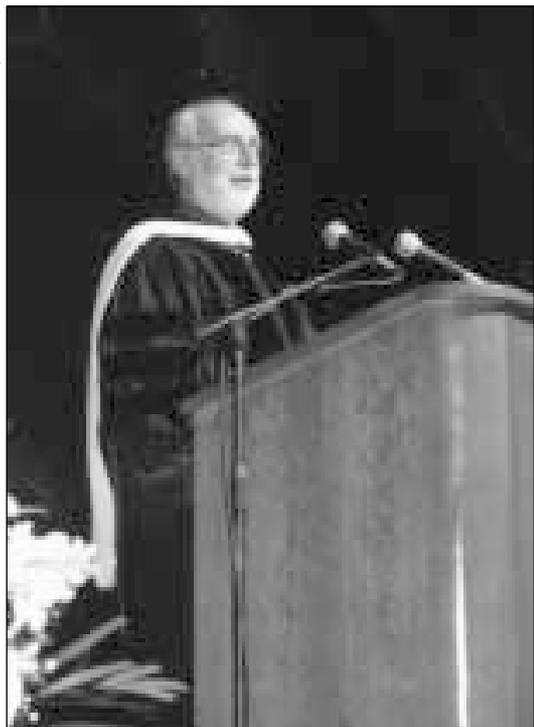
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SPEECH

## The "We Generation" Opportunity

Lorna Tychostup



Sydney Schanberg at the Winter 2001 SUNY New Paltz Commencement

*Graduation ceremonies are inherently emotional. Parents beam at their child's great accomplishment (as well as their own for successfully aiding the student through this financially challenging life endeavor). Graduates shift between highs of happiness and pride in completion, and lows of grief at a life being left behind mingled with anxiety about a future not yet fully grasped. It is rare that a commencement address can edge its way into this emotional morass and visibly affect its audience.*

*This past December at the SUNY New Paltz Winter 2001 Commencement, internationally known journalist, Sydney Schanberg, delivered such an address.*

*With most of his nearly 40 years in journalism spent on newspapers, Schanberg has written extensively on foreign affairs, particularly Asia, and on American domestic matters such as racial problems, government secrecy, corporate excesses and the weakness of the national media. His award-winning work*

*has also appeared widely in other publications and media, including journalism textbooks, anthologies of war reportage, and national and international magazines and film. The movie, *The Killing Fields*, which won several Academy Awards, was based on his book, *The Death and Life of Dith Pran*. For his reporting on the fall of Cambodia to the communist guerrillas known as the Khmer Rouge, Schanberg was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting "at great risk."*

*During the fall 2001 semester at SUNY New Paltz as the first fellow under the James H. Ottaway Sr. Endowed Visiting Professorship in Journalism, Schanberg taught a course titled "The News the Press Doesn't Cover," which examined how owners, editors and reporters make choices about what is important and newsworthy.*

—Lorna Tychostup

It has become common knowledge, gathered from opinion polls and simple, man-on-the-street interviews, that commencement speeches—they are by law required to contain a maximum number of clichés, truisms, platitudes, banalities and boilerplate—are the least remembered events on the planet.

Just ask any slightly older person in your family or circle of friends, ask them what the speaker said at their graduation ceremony and you will immediately confirm this sad statistic. Yes, sometimes people can remember the *name* of the speaker, or at least the last name... but that's about it. I remember my graduation speaker was the remarkable Helen Keller. I can't recall a single word of her address.

Thus, on this auspicious day, I come before you courageously—facing the virtually certain risk of delivering just another forgettable graduation speech. I would be grateful if you refrained from booing or hissing, even at the most forgettable passages. However, cheering and applause—unlikely as it is that such urges will seize you—are permitted.

If any of you are concealing bottles of champagne or other libations under your gowns, please feel free to sip from that at any time, if this is necessary to keep you awake.

And so, I now step away from comedy—into the void.

Looking around the country these days, sizing up one's prospects for the future, a college graduate might well come to believe that his or her outlook wasn't terribly encouraging. People are being laid off their jobs by the thousands, the homeless population is growing fast, in the big cities the lines are growing longer at food pantries and soup kitchens. Not only that, but the threat of terrorism is in the air, the nation is nervous and crime is even rising, after a long and welcome downturn, because the police are stretched thin with extra security duties.

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Sounds pretty grim, doesn't it? But maybe not. Bear with me a bit while I tilt the situation to a different angle and take a look at things from another perspective.

I was only a youngster during World War II, but I remember a lot of interesting things happening to me that I don't regret now. In fact I look back on them fondly. There was food rationing and gas rationing and the rationing of rubber. You needed ration stamps for automobile tires, for butter, for meat, for a lot of things made scarce by the war effort. There were just two movie houses in my small town in Massachusetts, the Globe and the Strand. Mostly, they were open only on weekends. During the war, you could get in free if you brought five pounds of scrap metal or a pound of aluminum foil, the kind you could peel off the paper in cigarette packs. It was a big emotional high for a kid—getting in free and feeling good about doing something to help with the war.

There were some profiteers then, people who took advantage of the war to make money—somewhat like the corporations lobbying right now for big tax breaks in Washington instead of pitching in to help the unemployed or the victims of September 11. But mostly back then, people did pitch in. You didn't hear a lot of complaining when you went to the store and stood in line for butter. You felt like you were a part of something bigger than yourself, something you didn't quite understand but nonetheless made you feel relevant, useful, not just looking out for yourself.

**It is common knowledge that commencement speeches are the least remembered events on the planet.**

Now, don't get tense and start your teeth grinding. I'm not going to give you the what-it-was-like-in-the-old-days routine. How we had to walk three miles to school in snowstorms and chop wood for the fire when we got home. All I want you to do is to allow yourselves for a few minutes to think about how all the troubles and challenges we're confronted with now could have a very positive side.

As a society, we haven't been called on to make many sacrifices over the past 50 years. Yes, certain segments of our culture have made more sacrifices than others—blue-collar people, minority groups, children in depressed areas like Appalachia. They more than others made the sacrifice of risking life to fight in Korea and again in Vietnam. They have also made the sacrifices of living at the lower end of the economic food chain and getting only the trickle-down leavings too much of the time. This democracy isn't perfect yet. But by and large since the Second World War, the nation prospered and grew and the standard of living rose significantly and our freedoms were protected.

And from where I sit, I think we began to take for granted the owning of our own homes and having a car, maybe two of them and for some maybe even a swimming pool. Then came the technology boom and the stock market bubble and we began thinking that every year things were automatically on course to get even better—and of course that was foolish. History should have told us that there are always bumps—the roads aren't paved smooth with platinum.

What if the problems we face now bring us closer as Americans, as World War II did in the 1940s and afterward? I know that a lot of you have been thinking about how you can make a contribution, how you can be relevant. I know this because everywhere I go these days, people bring up the subject—they want to help, they want to make a difference. I also know it because I have that feeling myself. As a journalist, I've covered a lot of wars, a lot of suffering. I've written about these things as a professional duty. Now I would like to do something about them. I'm willing to bet that a whole bunch of you feel the same way. You want to be valuable—not just successful for yourself and your families, but valuable and feeling good about yourselves.

What you face now is a great opportunity. True, jobs and other benefits will not come to you as easily as they did to the generations that immediately preceded you.

But you can prevail over that. More important, you can become not just another version of the several "me" generations, but instead a new "we" generation. The beginnings of this possibility have already been witnessed in the World Trade Center tragedy and its aftermath. People have taken risks for others without hesitation. People have come together more than they had in a long time. People have volunteered for community service. The question is: Can we sustain these new beginnings, keep them going? Or will we soon slip back into lazy ways, into self-indulgence and instant gratification?

This body of graduates, this body of hard-working achievers here today who were not born with silver spoons or silver anything in their mouths, you—you can decide which way it will go, which direction our culture will take.

The people I've admired most in my life's journey are people who do the "we" thing, who are able to do for others—doctors, nurses, members of the clergy, firefighters, police, social workers, teachers, coaches, parents who spend real time with their kids. And let us not leave out the soldiers, like the ones fighting in Afghanistan right now. I can't tell you how many times soldiers looked after me and kept me safe in my reporter's life. War does carry evil with it, because its goal is to kill before someone kills you—and in every war, innocents get killed and that is always evil. But soldiers are not evil; they are looking

after us and doing, at great risk, what we ask of them. And we need them to be there because there are times, to my mind, when war is just plain necessary because someone is clearly trying to destroy you, and you must defend your hearth and your family.

I really do believe that all these obstacles that are being thrown in your path are actually opportunities in disguise. I think you can have richer lives because of them. You can be a generation that mattered more than many others.

The task is not likely to be easy. Nothing really worthwhile is ever a walk in the park. Obviously, these judgments are taken from my personal experiences, from the times when I have found satisfactions in my life. Almost all of them have happened in the midst of difficulty and travail.

Our government leaders to some extent have been slow to see the opportunities in this tragedy. They have rallied us to war but not yet to equally shared sacrifice, not yet to common national service. This is not unusual. Political leaders are often slower than the citizenry to understand and rise to challenges. They are perhaps too removed from the street and the workplace and the field. No matter. In history, more often than not, it has been the people who teach the leaders, who lead the leaders.

We have seen some of this demonstrated in the horrific events of September 11. The people who selflessly rose up to help others, many of them giving their lives in the accomplishment of the deed, they had not before been hailed or rewarded as leaders—but they had been there all the time and they led us. Believe me, they will be remembered well.

And now you, this generation of graduates, have had the baton passed to you. You've been given the chance to pick us up and lead us through this mess we're in, this hate, this plague.

I honestly envy you. I also honor you. Imagine the chance of being named the "We" generation. Happy graduation, and much good luck. Thank you. ■

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## NEWS & VIEWS

SHORT TAKES, UPDATES & CALLS TO ACTION

### Chasing Anti-Americanism on Campus



In the aftermath of September 11, a not-so-subtle shift in priorities has gripped our nation. In some ways—an increased sense of community, people seeking ways to help the needy, an awareness of the connections between ourselves and others in the world—this has been positive. In other ways—an executive power-grab by G.W. Bush, increased surveillance of American citizens by the FBI, a seemingly limitless war—it has been quite negative.

Now comes the latest manifestation of neo-McCarthyism: as reported in the December 13 *San Jose Mercury News*, the Washington-based American Council of Trustees

and Alumni has distributed a report criticizing the nation's college professors who, according to the list's authors, are "short on patriotism" and thus guilty of comforting America's enemies.

The report is titled "Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It." In it, the authors assert that "colleges and university faculty have been the weak link in America's response" to September 11 and conclude, "when a nation's intellectuals are unwilling to defend its civilization, they give comfort to its adversaries."

Some 117 campus incidents are presented as evidence of anti-Americanism in higher education, and a number of professors are identified by name or post. Among those identified in the report is the president of Wesleyan University, who suggested in an open letter that "disparities and injustices" in American society and the world can lead to hatred and violence.

The report also criticizes a Yale professor for saying, "It is from the desperate, angry and bereaved that these suicide pilots came." And a professor emeritus from the University of Oregon made the list for advising that "we need to understand the reasons behind the terrifying hatred directed against the US and find ways to act that will not foment more hatred for generations to come."

The dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University is quoted as saying, "There is a terrible and understandable desire to find and punish whoever was responsible for this. But as we think about it, it's very important for Americans to think about our own history, what we did in World War II to Japanese citizens by interning them."

A number of journalists and students are also quoted from campus teach-ins and forums.

Who or what is the American Council of Trustees and Alumni? According to the *Mercury News*, the group "was founded in 1995 by Lynne Cheney, the vice president's wife, and Sen. Joseph Lieberman. Cheney is cited several times in the report, and is reportedly a close associate of its authors, Jerry Martin and Anne Neal."

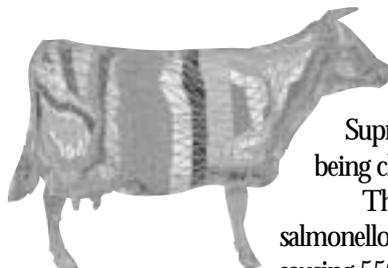
The author of the *Mercury News* report worried that ACTA had essentially issued an academic blacklist. Perhaps more disturbing is that this organization is, according to its Web site, the "largest private source of support for higher education," having contributed \$3.4 billion to colleges and universities last year alone.

In a related note, a complete reorganization of Florida's state university system recently gave Jeb Bush, the president's brother, the power to appoint all 145 new trustees, as well as a seven-member "superboard" that will govern the state's 11 universities. The governor selected the American Council of Trustees and Alumni to train these new appointees.

ACTA's report is available online at [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org), under the "what's new" category.

—Todd Paul

### Ground Beef: Caveat Emptor



In a recent decision by the Fifth Circuit United States Court of Appeals, the court ruled that the Agriculture Department (USDA) could not close a meat processing plant for failing tests for salmonella contamination. The processor in question, Supreme Beef of Dallas, failed three series of tests for salmonella before being closed by USDA in 1999.

The appeals court said that salmonella—the bacteria that causes salmonellosis, a diarrheal infection afflicting 1.3 million Americans a year, causing 550 deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control—was not

an adulterant because normal cooking practices for meat and poultry destroyed the bacteria and rendered it harmless. After the decision by the court, the Agriculture Department decided it will no longer shut down meat processing plants that repeatedly test positive for salmonella bacteria and will no longer rely on microbial testing at processing plants.

In effect, what the court has done is nullify USDA's 1996 regulation for microbial testing that for the first time in the 94-year history of meat inspection based the safety of products on a scientific standard. Since testing began in 1996, levels of salmonella have decreased substantially; from 1996-2000 the rate of salmonella cases per 100,000 dropped from 14.5 to 12. The meat industry believes it's due to plant improvements; USDA credits testing and tough enforcement. Inspectors will now again have to rely on "poke-and-sniff" testing for gross contamination.

The court's decision also transfers responsibility for food safety from meat processors to consumers. A footnote to the court's decision reads, "American housewives and cooks normally are not ignorant or stupid and their methods of preparing and cooking food do not ordinarily result in salmonellosis." Yet while "housewives" may not be ignorant or stupid, they may not be aware of the dangers of cross contamination. For instance, while salmonella in ground beef will be destroyed by cooking (at 160 degrees), a head of lettuce set down on the same counter with the tainted beef will become infected with salmonella.

A coalition of consumer and public health groups, including the Consumer Federation of America and the Center for Science in the Public Interest, have called on Congress to rewrite the Federal Meat Inspection Act to provide clear government authority to inspect for salmonella, and shut down plants that consistently fail to meet minimum pathogens standards. The coalition also suggests that high-risk consumers—children, seniors, the immune compromised—may want to avoid ground beef altogether.

—Brian K. Mahoney

## Female Top Gun Sues to Lift the Veil



The US military is justly proud of having helped free women in Afghanistan from the oppressive moral and religious code of the Taliban. One of the most enduring images of the war has been that of Afghan women removing the *burqa* and showing their faces to the world for the first time in years.

How ironic that, while they are fighting to free Afghan women, American servicewomen stationed in Saudi Arabia are subjected to equally strict rules. When venturing off the base, they must dress in the *abaya*, a dark, head-to-toe covering with slits for eyesight. They cannot venture out unaccompanied by a man, and they are not allowed to drive.

These rules are not imposed by the Saudi government. In fact, the Saudi embassy in Washington officially suggests that foreign women stationed in that country dress conservatively, but says they aren't required to wear the robe. Female employees of the US State

Department stationed in Saudi Arabia aren't required to wear the *abaya* when on duty, and their dress when off duty is left to their own discretion.

No, these rules are made and enforced by the US military. Which is why Lt. Col. Martha McSally, the nation's highest ranking female fighter pilot, is risking her career to sue her employer.

McSally is a graduate of the Air Force Academy, a champion triathlete and a crack pilot. In 1995 and 1996 she became the first woman in US military history to fly a fighter jet in combat, logging 100 hours in her single-seat A10 Warthog jet over southern Iraq, enforcing the no-fly zone. She is one of 39 female fighter pilots in the USAF and has trained fighter pilots sent to Kosovo and South Korea. She now commands an Air Force unit in charge of search-and-rescue missions over Iraq. Her unit is based in the Eskan Village military compound near Riyadh.

McSally is growing impatient with a military that will pay her to fly a jet fighter but won't let her drive a car, show her face or walk unaccompanied off-base. She has been fighting to get the rules changed for six years. Now she's taking her fight to court.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld is named as a defendant in her suit.

At least five senators have asked Rumsfeld to change the policy. But the US Central Command has defended it as an important sign of respect for Saudi custom. Following local custom also makes servicewomen less likely to face harassment or attack or become the subject of cultural controversy, says the Pentagon.

But American men aren't subject to the same regulations. McSally's suit claims both religious and sexual discrimination.

According to an interview with the Associated Press, McSally says she is suing because she resents being "treated like a Muslim piece of property" in Saudi Arabia.

"Just as we don't want to make someone who is not Jewish wear a yarmulke on their head, why would we have our female troops being mandated to wear Muslim clothing?" she says.

"It is a customary Muslim outfit for women, but I'm not Muslim and I'm not Saudi. I am a Christian."

—Todd Paul

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