
Recently Asked Questions What's the Beef at Beef Northwest

FAQ's

Is it true that some employees at Beef Northwest have asked for union representation?

The United Farm Workers Union first approached Beef Northwest management in June 2007. They claimed a number of our employees (unspecified) had signed cards authorizing UFW to represent them.

Was Beef Northwest aware that the UFW was speaking to its employees?

No, Beef Northwest was not aware that the UFW was speaking to its employees until June 5, 2007. However, according to documents from the UFW, the Union began speaking to our employees and requesting the employees to sign authorization cards in October, 2006

How many employees have signed the union cards?

The UFW has not given Beef Northwest any specific information. Our indications are that less than 15% of our employees are interested in being organized under UFW representation. Many tell us they are alarmed with the fact the UFW seeks to extract 2% of their pay check every week as Union dues.

If the number of Union cards signed is unknown, how do you know the Union represents a majority of the Beef Northwest workers?

We don't know. That is why we discussed entering into a neutrality Agreement with the UFW. That Agreement includes the process by which a neutral third party is utilized to verify the Union authorization cards submitted and whether a majority of authorization cards had been obtained by the UFW.

Was the Card Check and Neutrality Agreement ever signed?

No, but we did give assurances we would remain neutral as to workers signing cards while we negotiated the written Agreement.

Why did the United Farm Workers call off talks?

The UFW called off talks with Beef Northwest on August 10, 2007, even though the UFW and Beef Northwest had agreed on virtually all points, but one. Beef Northwest has acknowledged the UFW's rights to have employees sign cards. In addition to those rights, we asked for a process in which employees could withdraw their signatures if they had changed their minds about union representation or misunderstood what they had signed. Beef Northwest used language from House Bill 2891 which added provisions to [ORS 243.682](#) as the template for the process we proposed. That Bill was passed just this last legislative session by the Oregon legislature and signed by Governor Kulongoski. This process assured total employee confidentiality by putting the authority in the hands of a Neutral Third Party with no input from Beef Northwest or the UFW. The UFW would not agree to this process and called off talks.

Has Beef Northwest refused to negotiate with the United Farm Workers?

Not at all. In fact, Beef Northwest has offered several options to the UFW in order to jumpstart the negotiations again. Here's the problem. Beef Northwest has stated from the time the UFW first contacted us that this was an employee decision and that we would honor the employee's wishes - but it must be based upon a worker's free exercise of the right to join the Union or not to. The key is choice.

Why would an employee want to withdraw their card?

We believe they should be given that right in the event that they may not have understood what they were signing, that some may have been coerced into signing or that they simply changed their mind. It's all about their freedom to choose.

Has Beef Northwest been provided an opportunity to speak to its own employees regarding the pros and cons of a Union?

Effectively, no. It was not until the UFW called off talks on August 10, 2007, that the Company was able to speak to its own employees about the Union. When Beef Northwest was first notified by the UFW on June 5, 2007, the first demand made by the UFW was that the Company must agree to remain neutral regarding its position on Unions.

Has Beef Northwest tried to pressure employees to withdraw their cards?

Absolutely not. We respect our employees' right to organize. We simply want each and every employee to have a fair, equal and

confidential opportunity to choose whether or not they want union representation. Remember, our proposal in this regard was in writing.

What were the reasons Beef Northwest employees sought union representation?

The United Farm Workers have provided very general, unspecific claims of poor working conditions such as no shelter for employees to break or rest, lack of access to drinking water, not giving time off to employees for medical visits, and employees being forced to work when injured. These claims are patently untrue. Beef Northwest has employee break rooms with running water, wash and toilet facilities at every location. We have bottled drinking water and tap water available at multiple locations throughout the feed yards. We regularly have employees take time off for medical visits and other needs. We emphasize the claims of the UFW were unspecific - they have never provided details, even though we asked for them.

Is it true workers are forced to work when they are injured?

Of course not! All employees are covered under workers compensation insurance and if they were to be injured on the job, the work comp insurance pays their medical and travel expenses. If an employee is hurt badly enough and needs time off from work to recover, they receive wage compensation through their work comp insurance. Light duty work is offered to those workers who want to return to work but may have temporary restrictions while they are recovering.

Are employee's safety concerns addressed?

Yes, we have employee based safety committees at each feed yard for many years. They meet at least monthly. The safety committees review injuries and work place safety concerns. They work with management to remedy potential work place safety issues. The safety committee also organizes and conducts safety training and administers the company's Safety Incentive Bonus Program.

Has Beef Northwest management talked with employees about their concerns and reasons for wanting union representation?

In honor of the Neutrality Agreement we had with UFW, we did not talk to employees about their alleged concerns nor did we talk with them about the UFW until the UFW called off talks on August 10. In response, employee meetings were held at all of our locations August 30th and 31st. We explained that we were surprised by the UFW's claims that some employees may have issues at the work place. We immediately set up a process to further open the communication process by providing a confidential process for employees to submit grievances and concerns. There will be follow up meetings to review and resolve issues. We also assured employees we will not interfere with their right to organize if they so choose.

The UFW has made claims that beef coming from an animal raised at Beef Northwest was found with drug residues above legal Federal limits. What is the story?

Beef Northwest was established in 1991. We received a letter last winter from the FDA that 2 animals processed within one week had residue of sulfa above legal limits. This single incident for Beef Northwest equates to a rate of .00000116% for all animals processed since 1991. The beef did not go into any human food chain. This letter simply documents the issue and the response-it is not a penalty, a probation, a fine, a business stoppage, etc. We spent countless hours going through our internal Standard Operating Procedures with an FDA representative to make sure that our protocol was airtight. The audit results confirmed that our updated QC protocol in this area is excellent and should prevent this happening in the future. The animal involved was not part of any customer programs, natural or otherwise, and was outside the normal cattle flow chain. While we regret the one incident, it was not a food safety issue and we don't ever anticipate a repeat.

Is Beef Northwest open to a third party audit review of employee conditions and policies?

Absolutely. That is one of the first things that we volunteered to do when we heard the UFW's claims that there may be work place grievances. We suggested a panel made up of representatives from the Food Alliance, the Governor's office, or other independent sources. We have had inspections and oversight audits from every major customer or relationship that we and Country Natural Beef have, over the past three months, to assure these individuals and groups that our employees enjoy the working conditions we state. They have come away with positive views and value what we have accomplished. We are proud of our current and past employee relationships. See the employee link on our website.

What about the beef? I've heard that Country Natural Beef, which is fed at Beef Northwest, is represented in grocery stores as grass fed. Is this true?

The Country Natural Beef Cooperative has never represented their product as "grass fed". The cattle are pasture and range raised for 16 months of the animal's life, then shipped from the ranches to Beef Northwest where they are gathered. To assure consistency of finish, cattle spend approximately 90 days at Beef Northwest and are fed a nutritionally balanced 100% vegetarian diet.

Is it true cattle survive on not much more than French fries and used vegetable oil for the last 90 days of their lives?

No. A driving philosophy of Beef Northwest and Country Natural Beef has been the development of feeding cattle pure and natural byproducts from human food processing chains. We view ourselves as "recyclers" of wholesome products that, otherwise, may not be

used and hauled to landfills. As a result, feeds such as potato byproducts, wheat mill run, sunflower mill run and other byproducts are incorporated into the cattle's diets. These nutritionally balanced diets also contain dry distiller's grain byproduct, cotton seed byproducts, corn, alfalfa hay, and a Natural mineral/vitamin package. Beef Northwest utilizes the services of a professional cattle nutritionist who develops the balanced diets and monitors the cattle's health.

What and why the byproduct feeds?

For example, the potatoes fed in the rations are byproducts of regional potato processing plants which include cooked peelings, trim (excess potato after fries are cut), and French fries that miss the processors specs. All of these products are a 100% vegetarian nutritional and energy source. Use of these byproducts reduces the level of corn that would otherwise be fed in the ration and helps reduce the cost of producing food products for all consumers. Cattle utilization of these products also helps opens up farm acreage for diversified crops and/or alternate uses of corn. The processing plants and Beef Northwest follow strict Food Safety Assurance guidelines to ensure the quality of the byproducts that become cattle feed.

Is the feed the cattle eat fresh?

Yes, the cattle are fed three times a day, breakfast, lunch and dinner. The ingredients are blended together right before each feeding and are sampled and tested for quality and nutrition by an independent laboratory.

How can you prove you do what you say you do?

Beef Northwest utilizes the services of Progressive Beef out of Great Bend, Kansas, an independent company that provides third party verification. Progressive Beef has helped us develop internal audit procedures and conducts independent audits of our processes on a regular basis.

In our commitment to try and provide accurate information to our employees, customers and consumers, we will update this page with additional FAQ's in response to future comments and concerns that may become publicized.