

Wait! Only 36% of your beef burger may be the real stuff

They are the country's biggest-selling frozen beef patties but a close look at the packaging reveals that they are not very beefy at all - just 36% beef.

I&J "Beefers", which sell in packs of 10 and 16, are actually mostly non-meat, 64% of them being made up of "extenders" such as water, soya, flour, onions and seasoning.

"On the box, this food substance is referred to as 'beef patties'," said *The Times*'s Dianne Hawker, who bought the product for the first time recently. "I would argue they are not, given that the beef content is only 36%."



But it's all perfectly legal.

The SA National Standard (SANS) 885 stipulates the minimum meat content of processed meats such as bacon, polony, nuggets and viennas but it excludes raw processed meat.

"Our Beefers product does not fall under SANS 885, as it has not undergone any of the listed processes (such as smoking and curing)," said I&J Group's quality assurance manager Donovan Brickles.

"Rather, it is classified as a 'raw processed meat', for which no minimum meat content requirements are legislated."

But the country's labelling regulations forces I&J to declare - on the front of the pack - the fact that the patties contain only 36% beef.

The regulation - known as Quid or Quantitative Ingredient Declaration - states that if a food manufacturer emphasises a key, usually expensive, ingredient in the name or description of a product, it has to declare the percentage of that ingredient in bold on the front of the pack.

"Our Beefers product complies with this requirement, with the beef and water contents clearly displayed," Brickles said.

Quid was intended to protect consumers from being misled by manufacturers about the content of a product.

But those consumers who base their buying choices solely on price are likely to overlook the fact that a well-priced burger pattie is not very beefy at all.

It's not misleading in terms of the labelling regulations, says consumer attorney Janusz Luterek of Hahn & Hahn Inc.

"But perhaps it could be considered misleading in terms of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) if there was a cheaper ingredient in greater quantity than the beef, such as chicken."

A food industry source, who asked not to be named, said the CPA prohibited the marketing of goods in a way that implied "a false, misleading or deceptive misrepresentation, concerning a material fact".

"So, if a consumer can argue that they find the label of a "beef pattie" misleading, as it contains only 36% beef, they could lodge a complaint with the National Consumer Commission," the source said.

Source: The Times

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