

# TGIF Taking Great Ideas Forward

Improving Northern Capital - Sustainable Development in the Northern Tier

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Herbster, WI, March 14<sup>th</sup> – Volume 4: Number 11 [Back Issues](#)

**“Statistics: The only science that enables different experts using the same figures to draw different conclusions.”**

**-Evan Esar-**

## MEETINGS and EVENTS:

Links will provide additional information. Dates for recent additions are in **bold**.

<i>What</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Where</i>
<b>The Biodiesel Study Group has completed its work.</b>			
<a href="#">Wisconsin Aquaculture Conference</a>	<b>March 14 &amp; 15</b>	All Day	Manitowoc, WI
<a href="#">Herbster Smelt Fry</a>	April 12 <sup>th</sup>	3:00 – 7:30	<b>Herbster's Historic Gymnasium</b>
BCEDC Board Meeting	April 14 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 – noon	Washburn Library
<a href="#">Biofuels Conference</a>	<b>April 16 &amp; 17</b>	All Day	UW – Stevens Point
<a href="#">Sustainable Business Conference</a>	April 24-25	All Day	Ashland
<a href="#">Business Development Conference</a>	May 7 & 8	All Day	Cable, Lakewoods
<a href="#">Digital Healthcare Conference</a>	May 7 & 8	All Day	Madison
BCEDC Annual Meeting	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 – noon	TBA
<a href="#">Manufacturing Advantage 2008</a>	May 21	All Day	UW-Stout
<a href="#">Green By Design Conference</a>	June 12-13	All Day	Washington DC area
Northern Aquaculture Demonstration Facility Field Days	<b>June 12–13</b>	All Day	Red Cliff / Bayfield
<a href="#">Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference</a>	June 19 & 20	All Day	Cable, Telemark

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The safety of the United States food supply was the subject of hearings held Wednesday by **Rep. Bart Stupak** (D-MI), Chairman of the Oversight Subcommittee of the US House Energy and Commerce Committee.

A primary stimulus for the hearings was the recall of meat processed by **Westland/Hallmark Meat Co** and sold to school districts across the nation. The recall involved over 140 million pounds of meat (processed over a period of two-years). The government had rated the risk low. However, at issue was possible contamination of the meat with the *prion* (virus-like protein) that causes Mad Cow Disease. Video had surfaced on **YouTube** from the **Humane Society** showing slaughter of “downer cows” at Westland/Hallmark facilities. Mad Cow Disease has not yet been found because the prion is nearly impossible to detect in meat – much worse than the proverbial needle in a haystack – and Mad Cow Disease or Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE), although not proven to be transmissible to humans, would take years, perhaps over a decade, to develop. But safety demands that school districts and their supplier companies have had to replace meat purchased.

Following an emotional story relating the anguish of the Mother of a two-year old who needed a kidney transplant because of consuming spinach contaminated with the nasty strain 157 of *E.coli*, **Rep. Joe Barton** (R-TX) Energy & Commerce Committee Ranking Member said there is “No daylight between Republicans and Democrats on the matter of food safety.” There was a remarkable lack of partisan needling of witnesses. A conspicuous contrast with other congressional hearings I've watched on C-SPAN. Nevertheless, questions were tough.

The man on the hot seat was **Steve Mendell**, Westland/Hallmark Meat Co President. He had earlier refused requests by the committee to appear voluntarily and had to be dragged to the hearing with a subpoena. Needless to say, committee members were not in a warm and welcoming mood. Although, I must say that, hostility was nowhere obvious. I always find it remarkable how well members of the House and Senate maintain civility in dealing with one another even when differences are tendentious, tough and tense.

Mendell explained that his lack of response was because in the wake of the revelation and recall he had been doing everything he could to support his company's survival; which he characterized for the committee as “ruined.”

He avoided any direct admission of culpability and refused to take direct responsibility. He and his attorney explained the fine points differentiating a “downer cow” and a “non-ambulatory cow.” Along the way they waxed about how the company is committed to best practices, is audited by US FDA and audited by independent third-party auditors. The Company, they said, has a zero tolerance policy related to violations of humane practices. But Mendell knew nothing about practices in the pre-kill yard and at the kill box. Employees, Mendell said, blatantly violated company policy which called for humane practices.

Right!

Downer cows cannot be used in the food supply unless the cow is inspected by a veterinarian, explained Mendell's attorney **Asa Hutchinson**, former Arkansas Republican congressman and

nemesis of **Bill and Hillary Clinton**. He was present to serve as General Council for Mendell. **John Dingell** (D-MI), Energy & Commerce Committee Chairman, raised questions seeking clarification regarding whether Hutchinson was a witness or an attorney. From Hutchinson's behavior it was difficult to make the distinction.

Dingell also quipped about testimony as the “Finest fairy tale I've heard.”

Mendell claimed to have spent \$17,000 installing video cameras to monitor “every square inch of the facility” including the kill box where the Humane Society videos had shown downed cows being shot before being pulled with a chain into the kill box.

**Rep. Diana DeGette** (D-CO) questioned the timeline of installing the video cameras – after video has surfaced on YouTube – and established that there was no voluntary recall of meat until the Company was threatened by disclosure. Rep. DeGette side-stepped a question that popped to my mind; “Were the cameras installed to monitor employees or to catch the culprits who sneaked into the plant and filmed the malpractice?” She, of course, knew there was zero chance of Mendell or Hutchinson, providing a straight-forward answer if catching the videographer was the real reason for installing cameras.

Mendell testified that it would be financial suicide for a company to harvest a cow that is sick; there is no financial incentive to bypass regulations. He is apparently very right about that.

Another element of the hearing focused on irradiation of food for destruction of pathogenic microbes (but not the Prion of BSE). This highly effective procedure has a long history of controversy in the United States. It has never been possible for the food industry to convince the public, or reverse irrational public opinion that irradiated food is NOT RADIOACTIVE. The general public just doesn't get it, and a consequence is that we don't get food free of pathogens like *E.coli* and *Salmonella*, organisms easily killed with exposure to a Cobalt-60 source of gamma radiation.

The US Food and Drug Administration has denied irradiation, a regulatory green light.

Now may be a good time to look at how we could survive in the Northern Tier on a diet of locally grown food from small backyard or neighborhood gardens, greenhouses and feedlots.

But that is another part of the food safety story. Something too few people are thinking about.

## **LIGHTER SIDE:**

As with most jokes the original author is unknown. Whoever you are; “Thanks!” Names, when added, are intended to tease the innocent.

How many environmental economists does it take to change a lightbulb? Eight - one to turn the lightbulb and seven to do the environmental impact study.

Take care and enjoy a great weekend!

**/BRUCE**

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[Lake Superior Binational Forum](#), (LSBF) US Delegation Chair

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[Raindrop Garden Gallery](#), (RGG) Co-owner

[IDEA Consortium LLC](#), Owner

[Chequamegon Institute, Inc.](#) Initial Registered Agent

[Coalition for Eco-Industrial Development](#), (CEID) Acting President & CEO

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*The encircled fractal triangle represents an integrated cluster of seven ideas – economics, ecology, equity, ethics, experience, education and energy – that may be considered a core for sustainability studies. Bruce is available to present illustrated lectures and facilitate discussions about role of education in Industrial Ecology, Sustainable Development and the Sustainability Revolution.*