

Consumer Protection

The number of Alaskan Consumers and businesses is growing rapidly with the increased economic development in this state. It is hoped that this weekly column will assist consumers and the honest businessmen serving them to avoid and prevent the occurrence of unfair trade practices.

The following information is presented for general application only and, of course, could not apply in all specific circumstances. Those persons with specific complaints should contact the Consumer Protection Office nearest them or call a private attorney.

The Consumer Protection Section, Office of the Attorney General, prepares these columns for distribution throughout the state. Comments may be sent to that office at the following three locations: 360 K Street, Anchorage, Alaska 99801; 604 Barnette, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701; and Pouch K, Juneau, Alaska 99801.

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BULK MEAT SALES

Many consumers buy meat in bulk to save money. Real savings can sometimes be obtained from reputable and honest firms through the reasonable prices they offer.

Purchase of meat in bulk requires experience and knowledge of industry language and practice. For example, meat sold in bulk is sold at its "hanging weight," uncut and untrimmed. Bone and waste, as well as the edible meat, is included in this weight. The final price will be the advertised cost per pound multiplied by its hanging weight.

The U.S. Department of Commerce grades meat according to the yield of edible meat. For example, the average percentage of usable meat in Yield Grade No. 1 is 82% and Yield Grade No. 5 is 63.6%.

Many consumers do not have experience in buying bulk meat. The majority of meat dealers in Alaska are honest and reputable. However, an unscrupulous person may attempt to take advantage of the consumer's lack of knowledge in this area. To obtain a safe and saving purchase, keep the following information in mind:

Incredible sounding ads on the radio and in the newspaper should be examined carefully. If the ad suggests a comparison with local retail prices, remember the "hanging weight" will include much inedible fat and bone. The actual price per

pound of edible meat will be determined after the meat has been cut and will depend upon the yield grade.

The special in the ad will be readily available when you are dealing with an honest merchant. There will be no attempt to avoid selling the special by saying that it is not available or not as good as it was advertised to be.

When visiting a fly-by-night establishment, the consumer may find that the advertised meat is old with dark meat and yellow fat. Other fresh, red, trimmed half and quarters will be hung nearby. These fresh quarters may be priced at twice the advertised prices per pound.

In these circumstances, the consumer often is persuaded to buy the fresh meat even though, when finally packaged for storing, it may cost the same as meat purchased in the neighboring store.

Check the grade information. All meat in interstate commerce must be "U.S.D.A." inspected, but all meat is not necessarily graded by the U.S.D.A. There are eight grades of quality. Check ads to see if the grade information is given and whether the ad states that the meat has been graded or merely inspected by the Department of Agriculture.

A side of beef should not be confused with a half of a beef. A half may include two fore-quarters rather than a fore-quarter and hind-quarter. The choicest cuts of meat are in the hind quarter. The fore-quarters contain much waste, fat, and bone.

If credit is used to buy meat in bulk, find out the interest and carrying charges, and the total cost.

For information on meat cuts, industry terminology and bulk meat sales, contact the State Meat Inspector by calling the State Department of Natural Resources.

If a problem arises with misrepresentation by a seller, spoilage of the product, or unclean meat establishment premises, contact the State Meat Inspector or the Consumer Protection Office.

FREE ESTIMATES

Estimates for repair work or the sale of goods and services may be advertised as being "free" when in fact hidden charges or conditions are present. An estimate advertised as "free," which involves hidden charges or conditions, should be reported to the Consumer Protection Office.