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State Revises Hormone Label for Milk

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After an outcry from consumers, [Pennsylvania](#)'s Agriculture Department has backed off its plan to ban milk-container labels stating that the milk comes from cows not treated with bovine growth hormone.

On Thursday, the state issued new guidelines that required that the labels not be misleading and that there be a paper trail to verify the claims.

For instance, a label cannot read "No BST," which is short for bovine somatotropin, since the hormone occurs naturally in cows. A dairy can, however, label its milk as coming "from cows not treated with rBST" — for recombinant bovine somatotropin, the synthetic version — as long as a disclaimer is included that says that "No significant difference has been shown between milk derived from rBST-treated and non-rBST-treated cows." (A dairy can preface the disclaimer with "The F.D.A. says.")

The decision was hailed by some dairies and consumer groups, who had complained that the planned ban disregarded consumer demand.

The state's agriculture secretary, Dennis Wolff, issued a notice of the ban in October, arguing that the labels were confusing and impossible to verify.

The ban was supposed to go into effect on Feb. 1. It caused such an uproar that Gov. [Edward G. Rendell](#)'s office intervened. On Thursday, in a statement, the governor said, "The public has a right to complete information about how the milk they buy is produced."

Farmers use the artificial hormone rBST to stimulate milk production, increasing a cow's output by a gallon or more a day. While the federal government maintains that artificial bovine growth hormone is safe, a growing number of dairy companies are offering milk, and even cheese, from cows that are not treated with it because consumers want products that are more natural.

For instance, the private-label milk sold at [Whole Foods](#), [Kroger](#) and Publix grocery stores comes from cows not treated with bovine growth hormone, and within the next couple of months, all of [Wal-Mart](#)'s private-label milk will come from cows not treated with bovine growth hormone.

David Darr, director of industry research and analysis for the Dairy Farmers of America, the nation's largest dairy cooperative, said that the demand for milk from cows not treated with bovine growth hormone was largely regional but that there was growing pressure on farmers throughout the country to stop using it.

“The demand for it is turning pretty quick,” Mr. Darr said of milk from untreated cows.

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