

sold in the U.S., unlike frankfurters, contain only beef and nothing but beef. There is a simple reason for this, although most Americans don't know it. Legally, there is no such thing as a hamburger which is not an all-beef hamburger. The statutes of the U.S. Department of Agriculture define hamburger as a ground meat patty which contains no meat or fat other than beef or beef fat. If a ground meat patty contains even a smidgin of pork or pork fat, it can be called a "patty," a "burger," or a "sausage," but it cannot be called a "hamburger." In other words, by government decree, the beef industry holds a kind of patent or trademark on America's most popular convenience food. Here is what the operative code of regulations (Code of Federal Regulations 1946, 319.15 subpart B) states:

*Hamburger.* "Hamburger" shall consist of chopped fresh and/or frozen beef with or without the addition of beef fat as such and/or seasoning, shall not contain more than 30 percent fat, and shall not contain added water, phosphates, binders, or extenders. Beef cheek meat (trimmed beef cheeks) may be used in the preparation of hamburgers only in the accordance with the conditions prescribed in paragraph (a) of this section.

Ground pork can be eaten; ground beef can be eaten; yet to mix the two together and call it a hamburger is an abomination. It all sounds suspiciously like a rerun of Leviticus. Yet as in the original pork taboo, what appears as mumbo jumbo on one level has a hard core of practical sense on another. A key provision is that while hamburgers must be an all-beef product, they can contain up to 30 percent added beef fat, unlike ground beef, whose fat composition is determined solely by the fat present before grinding. Hamburgers, in other words, can be constructed by mixing beef and beef fat from entirely different animals. I have italicized the operative clause in the code governing ground beef:

*Chopped beef, ground beef.* "chopped beef" or "ground beef" shall consist of chopped fresh and/or frozen beef with

or without seasoning and *without the addition of beef fat* as such, shall not contain more than 30 percent fat, and shall not contain added water, phosphates, binders, or extenders. [italics added]

What all these arcane definitions and mysterious abominations add up to is federal endorsement of the hamburger as a mixture of two ingredients—a type of beef and a type of beef fat—neither of which is marketable as food without the other. The cheapest beef available, now as always, comes from lean, unfinished range-fed steers. But if you grind this meat up and try to make hamburgers out of it, the patties will fall apart in cooking. In other words, to make a hamburger out of range-fed beef, you need fat, the universal food binder. Any fat, animal or vegetable, would do, but since you want to make a hamburger, not a patty or a sausage, it must be fat from a beef animal. The focus now shifts to the feedlots and to cattle that have been spending twenty-four hours a day for four or five months eating corn, soybeans, fish meal, vitamins, hormones, and antibiotics. On their bellies they carry a paunch which must be trimmed off after they are slaughtered. It is the cheapest beef fat available. The union of feedlot fat with range-fed lean beef takes place in the industrial grinders from whence they emerge transubstantiated into the nation's supply of hamburger meat. Let hamburgers be made of pork with beef fat, or beef with pork fat, or prevent hamburgers from being made of beef fat from one animal plus beef from another, and the entire beef industry would collapse overnight. The fast-food companies need feedlot waste fat to make cheap hamburgers, and the feedlots need hamburgers to hold down the cost of feedlot meat. Since the relationship is symbiotic, when you eat a steak you are making it possible for someone else to eat a hamburger; or if you prefer, when you eat a hamburger at McDonald's, you are subsidizing someone else's steak at the Ritz.

Despite inquiries addressed to the Department of Agriculture, I have been unable to learn the history of how the Federal Code's definition of hamburger was negotiated. When placed alongside