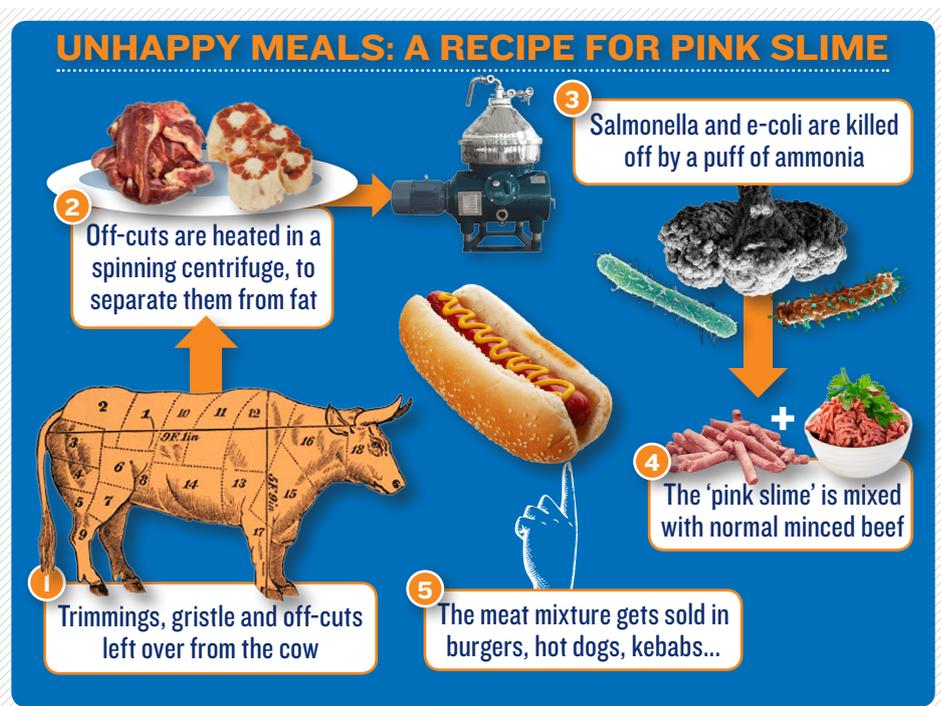


# Outraged Americans wage war on 'pink slime'

An unpleasant meat product known as pink slime has caused outrage this month. Yesterday, four 'slime factories' were forced to close. But is it wrong to be so picky about food?



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When a cow is butchered, some pieces are better than others. Rump and sirloin cuts are cooked as steaks. The tough hide makes handbags; less choice cuts get ground into mince. Bones and offal become unusual dishes or products like gelatin.

But what happens to the leftovers of this process? In the USA, even those scraps of fat, muscle and tendons don't go to waste. Whizzed together, ground and sterilised, they become 'pink slime' – a processed meat product that has millions of Americans feeling nauseous.

When chef Jamie Oliver used his US TV show to reveal how pink slime was made, viewers were horrified. Since 2001, they were told, the unpleasant 'meat' has been hiding in up to 70% of all ground beef products – with no requirement for it to be listed on packaging.

Since, thousands have joined Oliver's campaign, and pink slime has taken a pounding. Burger King, McDonalds and Taco Bell all banished it from their

menus, and schools refused to serve it. As demand plummeted, the slime's manufacture was forced to shut down three of its four factories – risking 600 jobs.

For the defenders, the campaign is a grave injustice. 'Lean, finely textured beef' – to use its industry name – is not a threat to health. In fact, it was invented as a way to remove deadly E.Coli from hamburgers, and is often used to create a less fatty beef mince.

But over-processed products have long been a concern – and the strange substance has touched a nerve. Today, reconstituted meat can be found in everything from ham to hot dogs. Worryingly, intensive processing has also been linked to health problems: sodium nitrate, just one of the chemicals used in bacon and salami, was recently linked with cancer.

Processed food, however, is more than just Spam. According to the US government, it means any ingredients that are changed from their natural state. Today,

even the most healthy, humble ingredients are subject to complex alterations: from dried apricots that are dehydrated and treated with sulphur dioxide, to milled and pre-prepared pasta, most of what we eat is processed.

## SLIME WAITS FOR NO MAN

Some say dependence on mechanically produced meals has gone too far. Today, our food is pumped with chemicals, pulped into strange shapes and stuffed into sealed packaging. It is robbed of nutrients and full of potentially harmful substances. Perhaps it is time to return to a more natural – and healthy – way of eating.

Others disagree. New processes have allowed us to enjoy exciting foods from all over the world, all year round. They have made our diets more varied, improved our health, and liberated us from the kitchen. Pink slime is cheap, healthy and less wasteful: it sounds unpleasant, but it should be celebrated.

## Q & A

### Q Will I have eaten this pink slime?

A If you live in Europe, don't worry: you haven't been unknowingly gobbling this by-product. The EU banned the sale of it after BSE – a brain disease affecting cattle – started spreading to humans who ate

beef. The illness is no longer a problem, but authorities are still cautious about meat that is eaten off the bone.

### Q So should I worry about processed foods?

A It depends on how much you eat, and what. Pre-prepared foods often contain higher levels of salt and fat than fresh food, which can lead to heart disease and obesity. And

although harmful substances are not allowed in food, many worry that additives can cause long term problems, or behavioural difficulties.

## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'Pink slime is disgusting.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

## ▶ Outraged Americans wage war on 'pink slime'

### WORD WATCH

**Jamie Oliver** – Jamie Oliver rose to fame as 'the Naked Chef' – cooking easy meals from fresh and natural ingredients. Now, he is a much loved celebrity chef with several restaurant chains, books and TV shows under his belt. Jamie has used his celebrity credentials to campaign for several causes, including better school dinners in British schools. The campaign highlighted 'Turkey Twizzlers' – a type of reconstituted turkey

drummer – and campaigned to replace them, and other processed foods, with healthy fruit and vegetables.

**E. Coli** – Escherichia Coli is a form of food poisoning caused by bacteria. Although some forms of the bacteria can exist harmlessly in the gut, outbreaks of harmful strains can make people seriously ill.

**Spam** – Spam is an form of tinned reconstituted meat. It is made from chopped pork should,

der, ham meat, water, salt, modified potato starch and sodium nitrate. Although it may not sound like a delicacy, it is popular all over the world: in the UK it was a staple during the rationing of WWII.

**BSE** – Mad Cow Disease affects the brain and spinal cord of cattle, causing sponginess in the nerves and tissues, and leading to a breakdown in control, aggression, and death. In the 1990s, people began contracting CJD, a human form of the disease caught from eating meat contaminated with tissue from infected animals.

### YOU DECIDE

1. Are we too reliant on processed foods?
2. Why do we think 'natural' food is better?

### ACTIVITIES

1. Design an advertisement for 'pink slime' that turns its man-made, unpleasant-sounding qualities into a selling point.

2. Keep a diary of all the foods you eat in one day. Analyse what is 'natural', and what is 'processed'.

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 **NOTES**

