

Drinks on the Melted Rocks

By Reg P. Wydeven
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One of my favorite TV shows is 'The Simpsons.' While I love watching Homer's antics, I'm always amazed at how Marge is able to keep the whole family together. She raises the kids, runs the household and is constantly fixing Homer's goofs. Plus she feeds the family of five on \$12 a week. When asked how, she explains that she stretches Homer's meatloaf with sawdust.

Marge isn't the only resourceful chef, however. A few years ago, Taco Bell was sued for false advertising after claiming some of its products contain beef. The suit alleged the chain used a meat mixture that contained binders and extenders, and does not meet the minimum requirements set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to be labeled as "beef." The mixture had just 35% beef, with the remaining 65% containing water, wheat oats, soy lecithin, maltodextrin, anti-dusting agent and modified corn starch.

Apparently the use of extenders in the kitchen isn't just limited to food.

The New Jersey Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control recently concluded a yearlong investigation of establishments across the state after receiving numerous complaints from customers alleging they were watering down drinks.

Dubbed 'Operation Swill,' the investigation revealed that twenty-nine bars and restaurants filled premium brand liquor bottles with cheap booze and sold it to customers who believed they were drinking the real thing.

Thirteen of the restaurants that were cited are TGI Fridays, located in central and northern New Jersey. A statement released by the popular restaurant chain indicated that it was working with Briad Group, the owner of the establishments cited. The Livingston-based franchisee owns 70 TGI Fridays in seven states.

The chain's statement went on to say that, "We have one of the most extensive bar and beverage programs in the industry, which sets a very high standard in the quality and service of our beverages."

The Alcoholic Beverage Control utilized confidential informants in its investigation and tested samples of the alcohol that were secretly obtained. Investigators seized inventory and records, but did not disclose the name brands of liquor that were replaced with less expensive substitutes.

Officials also did not reveal the identity of one New Jersey bar that was actually mixing food dye with rubbing alcohol and selling it as scotch. No health code violations were reported as a result of the investigation. Presumably because of the antiseptic nature of the rubbing alcohol.

Coincidentally, New Jersey joined Pennsylvania, California, and other states in having a \$5 million class action lawsuit filed in its courts against Anheuser-Busch, accusing the brewer of watering down its Budweiser, Michelob and other brands of beer.

The suits claim that former employees from the company's 13 breweries will testify that excess water is added to the beer just before bottling. This reduces the alcohol content reflected on the beer's label of 5% and 4% for light beer, which constitutes false advertising.

One of the big mysteries of 'The Simpsons' is what state the family lives in. Apparently, it's New Jersey.

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