Brewers Boil over Proposed FDA Rule on Leftover Grains

SANTA ROSA, Calif. (AP) — A proposed federal rule that would make it harder for beer breweries to sell leftover grains as animal feed has brewers' blood boiling.

Beer makers complain that the new rules, if adopted, would force them to dump millions of tons of "spent grains," which are left over after barley, wheat and other grains are steeped in hot water.

The Food and Drug Administration [1] rule change would mean brewers would have to meet the same standards as livestock and pet-food manufacturers, imposing new sanitary handling procedures, record keeping and other food safety processes on brewers.

Bear Republic brewmaster Rich Norgrove says the rules would be costly and force brewers to dump the grains, instead of the more sustainable practice of feeding them to livestock.

The Northern California brewery sells its spent grain to local ranches, which use it as an affordable food source for about 300 head of cattle, according to The Santa Rose Press Democrat. [2]

"Now the government wants to get involved," Cheryl LaFranchi, a Knight's Valley rancher, said. "What are they going to do with it? Put it in a landfill?"

The FDA says the rules stem from a new, broad modernization of the food safety system.

"This proposed regulation would help prevent foodborne illness in both animals and people," the agency said in the statement.

The FDA is collecting comment through Monday, and two of the beer industry's major trade groups have mobilized against the idea.

Chris Thorne of the Beer Institute said he believes once the FDA has all of the information, it will see the benefits of the current system of recycling the old grain.

Santa Rosa rancher Jim Cunningham gets about 10 tons of used grain from the Lagunitas Brewery every day at about $100 per ton.

With drought and other factors pushing commercial feed prices more than three times higher than the brewery grain, he says the new rules would affect his bottom line.

"It might put us out of business if we couldn't get cheaper feed," Cunningham said.

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Information from: San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News, http://www.mercurynews.com [3]

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