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NEWS IN BRIEF

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WASHINGTON DC, USA

President Obama delivered the first State of the Union of his second term on Feb. 12, citing current issues facing U.S. citizens. Notably, Obama recommended raising the minimum wage to nine dollars per hour, reiterated the importance of combating climate change, and promoted equal rights, protection for women and gays as well as gun control reform.

NABLUS, WEST BANK, PALESTINE

Women in the West Bank have been receiving sperm in mysterious ways from their incarcerated husbands serving time for terrorism convictions. The illegally smuggled sperm can stay viable for up to 48 hours in any container if kept at room temperature, and is being used by the wives for self-impregnation. The women claim that, because marriage is for life, they still deserve the right to bear children despite their husbands' legal statuses.

JORDAN

Fifteen-year-old girls across the globe were tested for their aptitude in the sciences. Out of 65 countries, Jordan scored amongst the highest, while the U.S. scored lowest in the world. Boys in the U.S. are now more highly ranked in science than girls, whereas, in the rest of the world, girls outscore boys at record numbers.

AUSTRALIA

On the fifth anniversary of a national apology to indigenous peoples for their brutal eviction from their native lands, the Australian government unanimously passed a bill acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first inhabitants of the region.

Contaminated meat versus local food sources: Europe, US question quality

BY CHLOE LINDEMAN

STAFF WRITER

What do Ireland, England, France and Romania all have in common?

Horsemeat.

The discovery of horsemeat sold as beef is the center of a growing food scandal in Europe. Britain and France removed several food products from their shelves after DNA testing indicated the presence of up to 100 percent horsemeat in certain foods.

Initially thought to come from Ireland, the meat may actually be a product of Romania, where new laws keeping horses off the roads make horsemeat unusually inexpensive.

According to the BBC, the issue began in mid-January when Irish food inspectors discovered horsemeat in certain packaged meats advertised as beef after they tested several burger products.

Additional testing revealed that some products labeled "halal" contained pig DNA. The halal designation indicates that foods are pork-free for Muslims, who typically do not eat pork products because the Quran forbids it.

Findus, one of the brands in question, sold mixed-meat contaminated lasagna and burgers in U.K. supermarkets like Lidl and Tesco. Although horsemeat itself does not present any health risks, the discoveries appalled many U.K. residents and spurred changes in food-testing requirements.

Findus U.K. recognized that the issue is "a very sensitive subject for consumers" and stated that the company "reacted immediately" to resolve it.

In the U.S., these recent discoveries highlight the question of transparency in the food industry, but this is not the first time that the issue has surfaced.

Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel "The Jungle" exposed some of the unsanitary practices within the U.S. meatpacking industry, resulting in massive reform of food safety legislation.

Locally, food quality and production ethics are primary concerns.

"The one thing that I always push for is ... more visibility in what's going on (in food production)," said Korey Erb, manager of the Guilford Farm. "If there's no transparency, then who's going to hold anybody accountable?"

Guilford's critical view of large-scale food production and the impact of long distances food sometimes travels was a major factor in the decision to switch campus food providers five years ago. Students, faculty and staff members petitioned for a new service with organic and healthy options.

Meriwether Godsey, Guilford's current food service, is a Virginia-based company that uses local and sustainable food sources whenever possible.

Chris Blain, the company's retail and sustainability manager, and executive chef Eric Pearce think the legislation governing food protocol in the U.S. is fairly stringent.

"We are one of the strongest countries in the world when it comes to regulations for our food," said Pearce.

At the same time however, Blain said, "The way we raise and consume meat in this country could stand some scrutiny."

As for the current safety of food in the U.S., there are mixed feelings.

Associate Professor of Biology Melanie Lee-Brown said that the kind of problems recently revealed in the U.K. occur "more often than documented by the media" in an email interview.

But Pearce, who holds a double degree from University of North Carolina at Greensboro in nutrition and food service management, is not too concerned.

"You would hear about it," he said. "It would be in the news."

Buying local is one way to ensure the integrity of food.

"We're very aware of what we're purchasing," said Blain. "We go with those small-scale producers because we can go out and actually shake the hands of the people that are raising the food."

One thing that Erb, Pearce and Blain share is a positive outlook on the future of food production and the ability of consumers to make a difference.

"We're in the business of giving our customers what they want and there's definitely consumer interest in safe, healthy and — as much as possible — local food," said Pearce.

"I think having local food networks is getting more common as certain people are getting fed up with the modern agricultural paradigm," Erb said. "We need to move beyond awareness to more of an understanding."

But Erb says he is optimistic.

"I think we're going in the right direction with most things."