USDA supports Meatless Monday? Not a chance.

JUL 26, 2012

When nutritionist Marion Nestle heard that the U.S. Department of Agriculture was encouraging its employees not to eat meat on Mondays, she was immediately skeptical.

In her food politics blog, Nestle wrote, “If USDA is really supporting Meatless Monday, that’s big news. Historically, the USDA has worked hand in glove with the meat industry and had firmly resisted suggestions it would be healthier for people and the planet to eat less meat.”

Meatless Monday is a campaign that encourages avoiding meat one day a week to become healthier and help the environment.

Turns out, the idea that the USDA may support the Meatless Monday campaign came from a note on their website that was part of an internal newsletter. According to the Associated Press, the note was talking about ways “staff can reduce their environmental impact while dining at the agency’s cafeteria.”

The note prompted a strongly worded press release from the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association. Choice excerpts of the release were posted on Nestle’s blog, including: “that the agency embraces the ‘Meatless Monday’ concept calls into questions USDA’s commitment to U.S. farmers and ranchers” and “Meatless Monday is an animal rights extremist campaign to ultimately end meat consumption.”

Nestle worded the USDA reaction best: “Oops. Mistake.”

Soon after the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association released its statement, the USDA announced via Twitter that the note on its website was posted without clearance and had been removed:

USDA MT @usdapress: USDA does not endorse Meatless Monday. Statement on USDA site posted w/o proper clearance. It has been removed // @FarmBureau