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ADVERTISING

PETA Uses Mad Cow to Air Its Beef

**Animal-Rights Activists
To Focus on Health Worries
In Bid to Convert Carnivores**

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As the government chases after the provenance of possibly dozens of mad cows, an animal-rights group is hunting to convert carnivores.


People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is launching a series of billboards and print ads during the next few weeks that depict a chicken with a machine gun and the words, "If the cow doesn't get you, I might," or "If the beef doesn't kill you, I will."

The marketing maneuvers come as part of an effort by the Norfolk, Va., group, known for its scare tactics, to convince consumers that all animals -- not just cows -- are unfit for consumption.

"We're trying to explicitly point out to people that moving to other species of animals is not likely to protect you or your family," says Bruce Friedrich, a director of vegan outreach for the association. One issue PETA intends to hit hard is the feeding of animal remains to animals as part of the modern agricultural process, which the group believes can introduce diseased animal parts into various kinds of animal diets -- and human stomachs. The FDA instituted a "ruminant feed ban" in 1997, which made it illegal to feed cattle remains to other ruminants, or animals that chew their cud. That includes beef and dairy cattle, goats, sheep, buffalo, deer and elk. It is still legal to feed cattle remains to pigs and chickens.

Billboards should appear in what Mr. Friedrich calls "the chicken states" -- Arkansas, California, Alabama and Georgia -- within the next 10 days to two weeks, he says. Print ads should begin to appear in alternative weeklies such as New York's Village Voice and Atlanta's Creative Loafing afterward.

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In this draft version of a new PETA print ad, a gun-wielding chicken makes the point that beef isn't the only meat with potential safety problems.

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The tactics are vintage PETA. The group was founded in 1980 and says it is "dedicated to establishing and defending the rights of all animals." In recent months, the group has run a print ad featuring actress Pamela Anderson in a bikini made of lettuce, and has waged a campaign against KFC, the fried-chicken chain operated by **Yum Brands**. At an opera performance at New York's Lincoln Center, some PETA members brandished bloody, skinned fox carcasses outside the theater in front of fur-coated visitors.

The effectiveness of such tactics is questionable. Indeed, rivals wishing to seize upon the beef industry's current woes should be careful, suggests Jonathan Asher, president of New York branding consultancy Dragon Rouge. "This is one of those classic dilemmas in marketing," he says. "You are handed a golden opportunity and if you overtly capitalize on it,

you will completely blow it."

Of course, PETA isn't known for being coy. It has already commenced several public-relations initiatives. Representatives have been passing out "emergency vegetarian starter kits," which contain vegetarian recipes, among other things, in front of supermarkets and in public squares.

Others also have tried to point out problems with meat. The Center for Science in the Public Interest, a Washington consumer-advocacy group, has called for the overhaul of "advanced meat recovery" systems used in food-processing plants to separate meat from bones.

Some other food groups are taking the opportunity to subtly point out the benefits of not eating meat. "We believe that the U.S. food supply is the safest in the world, and incidents like the recent BSE scare are unusual," says Judi Adams, president of the Wheat Foods Council, an industry trade organization. BSE, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy, is the formal name of mad-cow disease.

"At the same time, we don't have many recalls on wheat or bread products," Ms. Adams says. "They are pretty safe year to year, and that is only one of many reasons why consumers should be eating more grain products." The Wheat Foods Council has more than 50 members, including the American Bakers Association, General Mills, Kellogg and the North American Millers Association.

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