

Benjalex Assessment

For the 20 years of silence that manufacturers have built while hiding behind loopholes. This silence is now being broken by Benjalex.

“Free from” or simply misleading? – The legal loophole in meat products

Many people choose meat products advertised as “Pure” or additive-free because they want to avoid preservatives, especially sodium nitrite (E250).

In reality, however, what often happens is not that the manufacturer does not use nitrite, but that it creates the same compound in the product through another route.

How does this work?

The process consists of two parts:

- Plant extracts, such as celery, beetroot, or “spice extract” – contain natural nitrate
- Starter cultures – contain bacteria that convert nitrate into nitrite

What is the result?

Sodium nitrite is present in the final product – exactly the same compound known as E250.

It was simply not added directly; instead, it was formed through the reaction between the spice extract and the starter culture.

That is why it does not appear on the label as E250, but as “spice extract” and “starter culture.”

What does this mean?

Formally, the manufacturer does not add sodium nitrite, but due to the technology used, this compound is still formed in the product.

The European Commission’s SCoPAFF A.09 opinion classifies this practice as intentional use of an additive.

Cancer risk perspective

Simply put:

The “spice extract” → contains nitrate

The “starter culture” → contains bacteria

The bacteria convert the nitrate into nitrite.

The end result is the same as if the manufacturer had added E250 directly.

This nitrite may undergo further transformation in the body – nitrosamines may be formed, which the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies as carcinogenic.

Conclusion

The “free from” label does not necessarily mean that the compound is not present. Often, it only means that it was not added directly.

From the perspective of the final result, however, the same thing happens:

The body comes into contact with sodium nitrite.

Benjalex does not only read the label.

It looks at what happens inside the product.