

Assembly unanimously passes series of food product labeling bills

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The Assembly passed a series of bills that would restrict labeling on meat and dairy products.

The bills, AB 515, 516 and 518, would ban producers of plant-based and lab-grown food products from using terminology in their marketing that alludes to actual meat or dairy products like “cheese” or “bacon.”

They all passed by voice vote.

Even if signed into law by the gov, 515 and 516, which would ban products from using common dairy labeling like “milk” and “cheese” unless the product is from an animal, wouldn't take effect until at least 10 of 15 specified states enacted similar legislation.

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The states include: Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Kentucky; Maryland; Michigan; Minnesota; Missouri; North Dakota; North Carolina; Ohio; South Dakota; Tennessee; Virginia and West Virginia.

But AB 518, which would prevent products from being labeled as meat unless coming from an animal, states that it would take effect seven months after ratification.

The bills' coauthor Rep. Loren Oldenburg, R-Viroqua, called them a way to support the agriculture industry.

“As we get further and further away from the farm, generations away from the farm, these bills will remind people where their product comes from,” He said.

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protections would be responsible for inspecting companies and enforcing the labeling rules. Its fiscal estimate says the additional department costs of training and inspections would be minimal.

All three bills passed out of the the Senate ag committee but have yet to be scheduled for a floor vote.