



Consumer Federation of America

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Largest Recall in U.S. History Further Proof that Food Safety System is Failing Consumers

Sunday's announcement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of the largest meat recall in U.S. history – 143 million pounds – is yet further proof that our nation's food safety system is failing consumers. This latest recall comes on the heels of a host of meat recalls in the last year. Consumers are rightly concerned about the capacity of our food safety system to protect them.

This massive recall of meat produced by Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company was triggered by an undercover investigation by the Humane Society of the United States which revealed repeated incidents of inhumane handling of cattle and violations of food safety regulations in not reporting sick and injured cattle to FSIS inspectors. In its investigation, FSIS determined that Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company had engaged in the practice of slaughtering cattle that were non-ambulatory without consulting an FSIS inspector for over two years.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act requires that every animal that is to be slaughtered for human food be subjected to inspection before slaughter (ante-mortem) and after slaughter (post-mortem). USDA has traditionally focused inspection resources at the ante-mortem point in the slaughter process. However, recent inspection shortages at USDA could have resulted in a lack of proper oversight of plant activities and an inability of the inspector to adequately inspect every animal. If ante-mortem inspection was not being carried out effectively at Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company as a result of these shortages, it brings into question whether other parts of the inspection process are undergoing similar deficiencies. Congress should investigate the role inspector shortages plays in reducing the effectiveness of meat inspection activities.

This recall also calls into question the effectiveness of USDA's "downer" policy. In July 2007, USDA made permanent a prohibition on the slaughter of cattle that are unable to stand or walk when presented for pre-slaughter inspection. These "downer" cattle are often sick or injured and should not be included in the food supply. Any cattle that are injured after they pass pre-slaughter inspection have to be reevaluated prior to slaughter. The revelation that downer cattle were allowed to be slaughtered over a period of two years at Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company calls into question the legitimacy of USDA's policy on "downer" cattle. Congress should investigate whether USDA is fully

enforcing its prohibition on “downers” and whether industry pressure has resulted in an effort to allow some “downer” cattle into the food supply.

USDA hates to make decisions that exclude any animal from slaughter because each head of cattle is a big investment for someone. As usual USDA is more concerned with protecting the economic interests of producers than they are the health of consumers and, in this case, the welfare of the animal.

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Consumer Federation of America is a non-profit association of over 300 organizations, with a combined membership of over 50 million Americans. CFA’s Food Policy Institute was created in 1999 and engages in research, education and advocacy on food and agricultural policy, agricultural biotechnology, food safety and nutrition.