



Consumer Federation of America

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CFA Urges President to Appoint Public Health Expert as Under Secretary for Food Safety

Following the resignation of Dr. Elisabeth Hagen as Under Secretary for Food Safety, CFA today urged the President to appoint a successor with strong public health credentials and a record of serving the public interest.

The Office of Under Secretary for Food Safety was created by Congress in 1994 to address recurring charges of conflict-of-interest between the U.S. Department of Agriculture's marketing and promotion activities and its public health regulatory functions. The person who holds the position of Under Secretary, an executive level 3 appointment requiring Senate confirmation, is the federal government's highest ranking food safety official. Under the law, the Under Secretary of Food Safety must have specialized training or significant experience in food safety or public health programs.

Three presidents have recognized the value of having a public health expert in this position and have appointed well qualified individuals. As the importance of the position has become better known, the USDA has been able to attract impressive candidates.

- Catherine Wotecki, PhD, now Under Secretary for Research, Education & Economics at USDA, was the first person appointed. She is an expert in both microbiology and nutrition and later became dean of agriculture at Iowa State University.
- Elsa Murano, PhD, is a microbiologist who left USDA to become the first woman to serve as dean of the Texas A&M College of Agriculture.
- Richard Raymond, M.D. was serving as the Chief Medical Officer for the State of Nebraska when he was appointed. He was previously a practicing physician.
- Elisabeth Hagen, M.D., a graduate of Harvard Medical School who did postgraduate work in infectious disease had also served as FSIS's and USDA's Chief Medical Officer. She had been employed by FSIS and worked on a day to day basis addressing problems with meat and poultry inspection before she was appointed Under Secretary. Dr. Hagen has continued to focus the agency on its important public health responsibilities.

In the past many Americans thought USDA was not an appropriate place for a program whose primary function is one of protecting public health. The frequency of such charges has diminished and will likely continue to do so if the Obama Administration maintains the tradition of appointing highly qualified individuals.

The Under Secretary must have a strong commitment to protecting public health, be knowledgeable about the policies and programs carried out by the Food Safety and Inspection Service, offer a record of working effectively to find new ways to reduce foodborne illness and understand the program's role is

to protect the public not be another voice advocating for industry. Meat and poultry inspection is an important public health program. It needs and the American people deserve a highly qualified, experienced public health expert as its leader.

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Consumer Federation of America is an association of nearly 300 non-profit consumer organizations that was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy.