

**American Public Health Association
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Science in the Public Interest ~ Consumer Federation of America
Consumers Union ~ Food and Water Watch
Government Accountability Project ~ National Consumers League
Safe Tables Our Priority ~ Trust for America's Health
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union
U.S. Public Interest Research Group**

March 11, 2011

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Herb Kohl
Chairman

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member

U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chairmen Inouye and Kohl, and Ranking Members Cochran and Blunt:

The undersigned members of the Make Our Food Safe Coalition and the Safe Food Coalition, representing consumer and public health groups, trade unions and victims of foodborne illness, write to urge you to protect funding for the critical food safety functions of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the Department for Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Should the proposed cuts to the food safety budgets of these agencies for FY2011 become reality, consumer health and safety could suffer.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), every year about 48 million people (1 in 6 Americans) get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die from foodborne diseases.

To help prevent unnecessary illness, hospitalizations, and deaths, Congress last year passed the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) with bipartisan support. The Act, which was signed into law in January, is the most comprehensive reform of FDA's food safety laws in over 70 years, and directs the FDA to *prevent* foodborne illness before it happens – rather than after consumers have been harmed and businesses have sustained losses due to recalls. However, last month the House-passed FY 2011 continuing resolution cut total FDA funding by \$241 million below its FY 2010 funding. The food program at FDA, covering the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition and associated Office of Regulatory Affairs activities, was cut by \$54 million. This cut

would significantly hamper FDA's implementation of critical new preventive food safety programs, reduce inspection of food facilities, and prevent FDA from overseeing the safety of the growing amount of food coming to American consumers from overseas.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA's public health agency, is responsible for assuring the safety of domestic and imported meat, poultry and processed egg products. The House-passed FY 2011 continuing resolution cut FSIS funding by \$88.4 million below its FY 2010 funding and would almost certainly lead to decreased protections for consumers. Budget cuts would result in furloughing inspectors and reducing oversight of meat and poultry production, increasing the risk that contaminated meat and poultry will be sold to consumers. Furloughing inspectors will also cause disruptions throughout the supply chain. By law, slaughter plants may not operate without an inspector present and processing plants must be visited daily. Furloughs may cause some plants to shut down completely or reduce their operating hours, resulting in increased food costs to consumers and job-losses in the meat industry.

Cuts to FDA and FSIS could have a significant impact on a large and critical sector of our economy: food contributes nearly \$1.2 trillion to our economy, or 8% of the U.S. gross domestic product. Both the food industry and consumers benefit from robust, adequately-funded food safety agencies. Budget cuts will also perpetuate the costs to society of foodborne illness. The total economic impact of foodborne illness has been estimated at over \$100 billion annually. By adequately funding important preventive food safety functions (including inspections, development of preventive control plans, and import safety) the government, consumers and industry can actually save money in the long run.

We urge you to protect funding for the food safety functions of FDA and FSIS, and to protect American consumers.

Sincerely,

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