



Consumer Federation of America

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CFA Applauds Shift to Preventive Food Safety System at FDA

Consumer Federation of America applauds Congressmen Dingell, Stupak and Pallone for their strong leadership on food safety. Their bill, the Food and Drug Administration Globalization Act, will do much to improve the FDA's ability to assure the safety of the food supply. Consumers cannot afford an FDA that does not have the authorities and funding necessary to protect the public health. The current Salmonella outbreak linked to peanut butter and peanut paste is only the latest example in an unfortunate series of nationwide foodborne disease outbreaks that demonstrate the problems that can occur without strong FDA authority and oversight.

The legislation is a significant improvement over the initial discussion draft released by the Energy and Commerce Committee last year. CFA is pleased to see many important provisions critical to creating a preventive program at FDA in the bill including:

- Requiring that food processing plants perform a hazard analysis and develop preventive controls to reduce the risk of contamination;
- Mandating FDA institute and enforce performance standards for pathogen reduction;
- Requiring FDA to develop the capacity to trace foods back to their source;
- Providing FDA with mandatory recall authority;
- Enhancing FDA's access to plant records;
- Directing the agency to develop an active surveillance system for foodborne disease; and
- Increasing food safety research relevant to FDA regulatory needs;

The bill establishes a minimum inspection frequency of once every four years. CFA strongly supports a requirement that FDA inspect all plants on a regular basis. The 600 illnesses and 8 deaths in the ongoing outbreak caused by Salmonella contaminated peanut butter demonstrate the risks associated with foods most consider to be low risk. An effective enforcement agency must not rely solely on company audits to protect the public. While we're pleased the members of Congress have adopted the philosophy of minimum inspection frequency, once every four years is not sufficient to protect the public. We do not think the American people believe every four years provides realistic protection. Opinion research conducted by Consumers Union shows that most Americans think once a month is an appropriate frequency. We look forward to working with the sponsors to tighten this requirement.

The bill also envisions a program whereby a third party would certify that a plant meets standards set forth by the FDA for safe food production. It is unclear whether the bill intends for such a program to be used for domestic food as well as for imported food. CFA does not support the use of third parties in certifying domestic facilities and supports only limited use of certification for foreign facilities. Recent news reports about the use of third party auditors by the company at the center of the current Salmonella outbreak suggests that Congress should be very cautious about any role third parties play in the food safety system.

We look forward to working with Congressmen Dingell, Stupak and Pallone on this important bill. We encourage Congress to act quickly to pass strong legislation to reform the FDA. Food safety is a critical public health problem and Congress should not wait any longer before reforming FDA.

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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.