



Consumer Federation of America

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Contact: Chris Waldrop, 202-797-8551
Carol Tucker-Foreman, 202-441-4510

CFA Supports Efforts to Modernize Food Safety System

Consumer Federation of America today endorsed the Food Safety Modernization Act introduced by Rep Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and urged the Congress to act quickly and favorably on it.

“The Food Safety Modernization Act provides essential tools to begin rebuilding the federal government’s capacity to assure our food is safe,” stated Chris Waldrop, director of CFA’s Food Policy Institute. “The past few years have been marred by a series of food poisoning outbreaks traced to contaminated products we assumed were safe to put on the family dinner table. Common foods such as spinach, leafy greens, jalapeno peppers and peanut butter have caused hundreds of illnesses and more than a dozen deaths. These outbreaks provide the public, the Congress and President Obama alarming evidence that the agency charged with assuring the safety of most of the nation’s food supply does not have the legal authority, the leadership or the structural integrity to do the job.

“FDA’s food safety program is primarily remedial. The Agency waits until reports of illness and death accumulate before it takes action. Congresswoman DeLauro’s bill introduces a new paradigm, requiring the FDA to adopt a program that prevents foodborne illnesses.”

The Food Safety Modernization Act:

- Compels all domestic food processing plants to register with the FDA and to develop process controls that reduce the risk of contamination.

- Requires the FDA to establish and enforce performance standards limiting contaminants in food; to inspect food processing plants on a risk-based frequency; to set up on-farm food safety measures; to develop the ability to trace contaminated foods back to their source; and to work more closely with state and local health authorities.

- Provides the government new authority to require companies to recall adulterated food and to assess civil and criminal penalties against persons who break the law and expands existing authority to seize and detain contaminated food.

--Requires imported foods to meet the same standards for food safety as domestic foods and establishes a program to assure the safety of imported foods.

--Increases the frequency of FDA inspections of food processing facilities. Currently, the FDA inspects some plants only once every ten years. The FSMA requires inspections based on degree of risk. Plants producing the highest risk foods would be inspected daily and every plant would be inspected at least once a year.

Finally, the Food Safety Modernization Act addresses the inadequate food safety structure at the Department of Health and Human Services. Food safety is, at best, a second tier issue at the giant department and it has been a neglected stepchild in the Food and Drug Administration where leaders are chosen for their expertise in drug research and regulation.

The DeLauro bill creates a new Food Safety Administration within the Department and assigns authority and responsibility for managing the HHS food safety programs, budget and personnel to a newly created Commissioner of Food Safety and Nutrition. Responsibility for regulating drugs, medical devices and cosmetics would reside in a renamed Federal Drug Administration which would be led by the Commissioner of Drugs.

Carol L. Tucker-Foreman, CFA's distinguished fellow in food safety added, "Even the most powerful person in the world has to worry about keeping his family safe from contaminated food. Last week President Obama reacted like any other father to the massive peanut butter contamination. In the midst of dealing with the nation's economic problems, he expressed concern that his peanut butter loving daughter might contract salmonellosis from eating a favorite sandwich. Unlike other parents, however," Tucker-Foreman said, "the President has the power to launch changes that will help protect us all.

"We realize the new Administration must address problems with the nation's economy, job loss and business failure and that establishing a new health care system is a priority. However, history suggests we will continue to be exposed to serious food poisoning outbreaks until the dysfunctional HHS food safety program is strengthened. We hope the President will consider urging Congress to fast track passage of food safety legislation that includes the kind of authorities envisioned by Representative DeLauro."

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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.