



Consumer Federation of America

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CFA's Carol Tucker-Foreman Urges Congress to Modernize Food Safety Laws

Testifies Before House Agriculture Committee

Carol L. Tucker-Foreman, Distinguished Fellow at Consumer Federation of America's Food Policy Institute, today told the House Agriculture Committee that the lack of adequate food safety systems has become an emergency the Congress must address by enacting new laws that require the FDA to prevent foodborne illness rather than reacting to it and modernizing the FMIA and PPIA so that the Department of Agriculture can effectively enforce its HACCP and sanitation systems. Both agencies need more research to build science based systems.

Tucker-Foreman noted that the continuing string of foodborne illnesses is bad for consumers, food processors and farmers. The public is losing confidence in the safety of the nation's food supply. States represented by members of the Agriculture Committee are among those hit by the last three outbreaks—contaminated peppers, peanut products and sprouts.

- Peppers contaminated with *Salmonella* Saintpaul sickened 1,442 persons in 43 states, including 559 Texans, 120 people in Illinois, 42 in Georgia and 59 in Arizona.
- Salmonella-contaminated peanut products made 691 persons ill and killed 9 people in 46 states. The victims included 100 Ohioans, 76 Californians, and 43 Minnesotans.
- Earlier this month 84 Nebraskans, 27 Iowans, and 5 Kansans and South Dakotans were among the victims of a *Salmonella* Saintpaul outbreak traced to eating contaminated fresh sprouts.

Tucker-Foreman urged Congress to change the Food and Drug Act to direct FDA to concentrate on preventing foodborne illness and give it power and funding to do so. She also urged the committee to give FDA a separate organizational entity within HHS as recommended by Representative Rosa DeLauro.

She suggested that Congress could take a look at USDA's FSIS to see how important that separate organizational structure and institutional leadership can be.

“Since 1994 the FSIS has come out of the dark ages,” Tucker-Foreman said. “Unlike FDA, the FSIS system is focused on preventing foodborne illness. For imported products, FSIS has established a system for determining whether imported meat and poultry products are as safe as domestic products, unlike FDA which has no authority to restrict imported food.

“Congress has also acted to give FSIS leadership and to make it a separate public health agency within USDA, moving it from the USDA’s marketing activities,” Tucker-Foreman continued. “The position of Under Secretary for Food Safety is the highest ranking food safety officer in government.

“The agency is still burdened by operating under a seriously outmoded statute which does not give it authority to enforce its HACCP system effectively and lacks a trained staff of scientists and statisticians who can develop a risk-based inspection program. Adequate funding for inspectors is also critical so that the agency can meet its statutory obligation to maintain a federal presence in every plant every day.” Tucker-Foreman added.

“However, I’ve come to think of the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the USDA as the Rodney Dangerfield of food safety,” Tucker-Forman said. “It gets no respect despite having made major strides in the last 15 years to improve its food safety efforts. It is unlikely to completely shed the old image until Congress modernizes the underlying laws that continue to hamper the agency.”

Carol Tucker Foreman’s written testimony will be available on the CFA website at: www.consumerfed.org.

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Carol Tucker Foreman is Distinguished Fellow at Consumer Federation of America’s Food Policy Institute. She was Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services, 1977-81. Her responsibilities included oversight of the nation’s meat, poultry and egg inspection and food assistance programs.

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.