



Consumer Federation of America

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CONSUMER GROUPS AND TRADE UNIONS BLAST FARM BILL'S BACKDOOR EFFORT TO DISMANTLE FEDERAL MEAT AND POULTRY INSPECTION SYSTEM

80% of Federally Inspected Plants Eligible to "Avoid Hassle" of Federal Meat Safety Program by Switching to State Inspection

A coalition of consumer groups and trade unions today condemned provisions in H.R. 2419, the Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act of 2007 (the 2007 Farm Bill) that will weaken food safety programs and increase the risk of foodborne illness.

In a letter to the entire House of Representatives, the groups warned that the provisions:

- Eliminate the 40 year old protection in the federal meat and poultry inspection acts that prohibit shipping state inspected meat across state lines
- Make 80% of all federally inspected plants eligible to leave federal inspection in favor of state programs which supporters of the bill insist are more understanding of company problems.
- Do not allow states to impose additional or higher food safety standards
- Ignore the inability of states to implement recalls of adulterated meat and poultry that have crossed state lines.

The provisions were included in H.R. 2419 despite a U.S. Court of Appeals decision that Congress was justified in limiting sales of state inspected meat and a USDA OIG report that said the Department allowed states that did not meet federal food safety standards to continue operating their inspection programs. The OIG report included stomach-turning details of state inspected plants where cutting boards were contaminated with bits of meat left over from the previous day's work and employees failed to monitor cooking temperatures. After years of ignoring state failures, USDA recently took over New Mexico's inspection program that had glaring food safety failures.

USDA annually reviews each individual foreign plant that ships to the U.S. but does not review individual state inspected plants.

The House Agriculture Committee held no public hearings on the provisions, which were drafted by state inspection officials and agreed to by meat trade associations.

Former USDA official Carol Tucker Foreman, now with Consumer Federation of America, said “we fear this is the first step in dismantling federal meat inspection. Eighty percent of all federally inspected plants would be eligible to move to state inspection and continue to sell their products anywhere in the country.”

Tucker Foreman further added, “Recalls would be a nightmare. State officials have no power outside their jurisdiction. Mississippi officials can’t go to California to be sure the state-inspected company has managed the recall and gotten adulterated products off the shelf. These provisions will build state bureaucracies and cut federal spending but surely raise the medical and human costs of increased foodborne illness. It is a bad decision and if the House Agriculture Committee had held hearings we would have told them that.”

Groups signing onto the letter include: the Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention, Consumer Federation of America, Food & Water Watch, Government Accountability Project, National Consumers League, Safe Tables Our Priority, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union and the American Federation of Government Employees

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The Safe Food Coalition consists of consumer groups, groups representing victims of foodborne illness, and union organizations dedicated to reducing the burden of foodborne illness in the United States. The American Federation of Government Employees is the largest federal employee union representing 600,000 federal and D.C. government workers nationwide and overseas.