

URGENT! The Senate Should Act on FDA Food Safety Reform

Each year, 76 million Americans are sickened, 325,000 hospitalized and 5,000 die from consuming contaminated food. Most at risk are young children, the elderly and people whose immune systems are weakened by other diseases or treatments like chemotherapy. Recent outbreaks of deadly e. coli and salmonella in spinach, peanut butter, cookie dough and lettuce demonstrate that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is hampered by outdated laws, insufficient authorities, and inadequate resources. Almost a year ago, the House passed H.R. 2749 in July 2009 with bipartisan support. Now it's time for the Senate to pass S. 510, to improve the safety of the food supply.

S. 510, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, will protect the public by:

- Requiring FDA to inspect high-risk food-processing plants at least once a year, rather than the current rate of once every ten years;
- Providing FDA with mandatory recall authority – something the agency does not now have.
- Requiring imported food to meet the same safety standards as food produced in the U.S.
- Directing FDA, in consultation with USDA, the National Organic Program, and State agriculture departments, to develop on farm regulations to prevent the contamination of leafy greens, fruits and vegetables; and
- Requiring food processors to identify where contamination may occur in the food production process, and take steps to prevent it.

S. 510 protects small, sustainable and organic farms by:

- Directing FDA to ensure that its produce regulations do not conflict with nor duplicate organic requirements; and
- Requiring FDA to consider the impact of produce regulations on small and diversified farms, on conservation, and on the environment when developing implementing regulations.

Consumers Union supports amending S. 510 to include Senator Stabenow's bill (S. 2758), which would provide training and technical assistance grants to small farmers and processors to help them meet the requirements of the new law.

Time is running out on this session of Congress. Foodborne disease outbreaks highlight the need to bring our food-safety laws into the 21st century. The Senate should act now to change to this 70-year-old law.

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