

SAFE FOOD COALITION

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February 22, 2008

Susan E. Dudley
Administrator
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
The Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Ms. Dudley:

The undersigned members of the Safe Food Coalition urge you to immediately request from the U.S. Department of Agriculture its proposed rule to provide to the public lists of retail consignees of meat and poultry products that have been voluntarily recalled by a federally inspected meat or poultry plant. The proposal, having been previously reviewed by OMB, is now under final departmental review at USDA. We urge you to request the proposed rule from USDA so that this important consumer protection measure can be swiftly implemented.

The Safe Food Coalition includes consumer groups, groups representing victims of foodborne illness, and union organizations dedicated to reducing the burden of foodborne illness in the United States. Safe Food Coalition members are committed to providing consumers with pertinent information during a recall so that consumers can avoid consuming contaminated products.

The past year has seen a spate of foodborne illness outbreaks and recalls of meat and poultry products. The meat industry recalled a record 33.4 million pounds of beef last year for possible *E. coli* O157:H7 contamination. The recall of ground beef from Topps Meat Company in September 2007 alone totaled 21.7 million pounds. Just this week, USDA announced the largest meat recall in U.S. history – 143 million pounds of beef products. Information in the media about this recall has been confusing and incomplete. Without accurate information about where these products were sold, consumers are left in the dark as to whether they have purchased products subject to the recall.

In any recall, consumers need sufficient information so they can determine if products they have already purchased are part of the recall. If consumers are unable to properly identify whether products in their possession are part of a recall, they risk consuming the contaminated product, greatly increasing their risk of illness or even death.

Providing information to the public identifying the retail consignees of recalled products will enhance the efficiency of recalls by helping consumers properly identify whether recalled products may be in their possession. This proposal is not intended to take the place of current recall procedures already in place. Rather, the provision of this information will enhance the current process and provide FSIS with yet another tool to help ensure safe and effective recalls of contaminated products.

Currently, consumers cannot accurately identify recalled products because of a series of memoranda of understanding between the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and State and Federal agencies prohibiting disclosure of recall information to the public.

Without any increase in costs, FSIS' proposal is a far more open and transparent approach that will provide consumers with information about the particular retail stores at which the contaminated product has been sold.

We strongly support the FSIS proposed rule and urge you to request it from USDA so that it can be quickly approved. We would be pleased to meet with you to provide additional information about our support for this important consumer protection measure.

Sincerely,

Patricia Buck
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention

Caroline Smith DeWaal
Center for Science in the Public Interest

Chris Waldrop
Consumer Federation of America

Ami Gadhia
Consumers Union

Wenonah Hauter
Food & Water Watch

Jacqueline Ostfeld
Government Accountability Project

Sally Greenberg
National Consumers League

Nancy Donley
Safe Tables Our Priority

cc: Jim Nussle, Director, Office of Management and Budget
Margaret Malanoski, Policy Analyst, Office of Information and Regulatory
Affairs
Ed Schafer, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Richard Raymond, Under Secretary, Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA