

SAFE FOOD COALITION

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February 14, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Schafer:

The undersigned members of the Safe Food Coalition urge you to immediately approve the Food Safety and Inspection Service proposed rule that would 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 has previously been through the approval process and is now under final departmental review at USDA. We urge you to expedite the final clearances at USDA and forward the proposed rule to the Office of Management and Budget 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. When recalls are announced, 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 immediately approve the proposal and forward it to OMB for final clearance. Further delays of this important consumer protection measure are unacceptable.

Sincerely,

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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

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National Consumers League

Nancy Donley
Safe Tables Our Priority

cc: Richard Raymond, Under Secretary, Food Safety and Inspection Service