

**American Public Health Association
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Science in the Public Interest ~ Consumer Federation of America
Consumers Union ~ Food and Water Watch
Government Accountability Project ~ National Consumers League
STOP Foodborne Illness ~ The Pew Charitable Trusts
Trust for America's Health ~ U.S. Public Interest Research Group**

June 14, 2011

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

As you consider **H.R. 2112**, the 2012 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food & Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, the undersigned members of the Make Our Food Safe Coalition and the Safe Food Coalition, representing consumer and public health groups, trade unions and victims of foodborne illness, write to urge you to **restore funding for the critical food safety functions of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the Department for Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)**. The proposed cuts to the food safety budgets of these agencies for FY 2012 will impede their ability to protect the public health and ensure the safety of our food supply. The recent foodborne illness outbreak traced to contaminated German bean sprouts underscores the importance of ensuring that these agencies have the funds they need to protect the safety of the food supply – both domestically produced and imported.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), every year about 48 million people (1 in 6 Americans) get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die from foodborne diseases. The total economic impact of foodborne illness to society has been estimated at over \$100 billion annually.

FDA is currently working to implement the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), passed last year by Congress with bipartisan support. The Act directs the FDA to *prevent* foodborne illness before it happens by developing critical new preventive food safety programs, increasing inspection of food facilities, and better assuring the safety of the growing volume of imported food. The evolving nature of science and the increasing complexities of pathogens in our food supply, coupled with the new protections in the law, demonstrate the need for increased financial resources for an agency that has been severely underfunded for decades.

According to a recent poll commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts, two out of three likely voters support additional funding for the FDA to carry out its new responsibilities related to food safety.¹ However, the food program at FDA, covering the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition and associated Office of Regulatory Affairs activities, was cut by \$87 million. This reduction would

¹ <http://www.makeourfoodsafef.org/news?id=0065>

significantly hamper the agency's food safety efforts, put consumers at greater risk of foodborne illness, and erode consumer confidence in the safety of the food supply.

We are also concerned about reductions to the budget of the Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA's public health agency, which is responsible for assuring the safety of domestic and imported meat, poultry and processed egg products. The House Appropriations committee cut FSIS's budget by \$35 million below its FY 2011 funding levels and urges the agency to expand its controversial HACCP-Based Inspection Models Project (HIMP). The cuts, and the expansion of HIMP, could increase the risk that contaminated meat and poultry will be sold to consumers. A recent report by the University of Florida's Emerging Pathogens Institute found that four of the top five riskiest pathogen-food combinations involved meat and poultry products.² Poultry contaminated with *Campylobacter* was ranked number one in terms of the highest annual disease burden in the U.S. Clearly, continued government oversight of the safety of meat and poultry products is essential. Reducing funding for the FSIS meat and poultry inspection program would almost certainly lead to decreased protections for consumers.

FDA and FSIS are essential agencies charged with assuring the safety of the U.S. food supply; no other agencies perform these critical functions. Adequately funding these agencies is vital to protect the public health and we urge Congress to restore funding for both FDA and FSIS.

Sincerely,

American Public Health Association
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Consumer Federation of America
Consumers Union
Food & Water Watch
Government Accountability Project
National Consumers League
STOP Foodborne Illness (formerly S.T.O.P.--Safe Tables Our Priority)
The Pew Charitable Trusts
Trust for America's Health
U.S. Public Interest Research Group

² <http://www.epi.ufl.edu/?q=RankingTheRisks>