



American Public Health Association

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April 26, 1999

Mohammad N. Akhter, MD, MPH
Executive Director

The Honorable John Dingell
2328 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515-0601

Dear Representative Dingell:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), the largest and oldest organization of public health professionals in the world dedicated to advancing the nation's health, I am writing to express APHA's support for H.R. 830, the Imported Food Safety Act of 1999.

Because Americans are consuming more imported foods than ever, it is essential that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the tools and the resources to ensure that these foods are safe for our dinner tables. Your legislation takes several steps toward ensuring the safety of imported food products.

First, your legislation would give FDA the authority to require prior approval of imported foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables. If FDA is denied the right to inspect these foods, or if the foreign country does not meet the same level of food safety protection as the U.S., FDA could prohibit those foods from crossing the border.

APHA is especially pleased with the provision in your legislation that would establish a "Manhattan Project" to develop "real time" tests to detect food-borne pathogens. These tests, which are capable of detecting food-borne pathogens within 60 minutes, are essential to detecting and preventing the spread of food-borne disease outbreaks.

Finally, H.R. 830 would create a user fee to generate funding for increased border inspections and research and development. While we understand the need to fund the new initiatives in this legislation, we would instead urge you to require both domestic and foreign food producers register with FDA and pay a small registration fee. In this case, FDA would both raise revenue for these new initiatives and provide FDA with the names and addresses of all food producers and processors the agency is required to inspect.

Thank you for your commitment to improving the safety of imported foods and continuing the dialogue on this important public health matter. APHA looks forward to working with you this year on efforts to improve the safety of our nation's food supply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard A. Levinson".

Richard A. Levinson, MD, DPA
Associate Executive Director for Programs and Policy