

February 24, 1999

The Honorable John Dingell  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Dingell:

On behalf of the Center for Science in the Public Interest's one million members, I am writing to support the Imported Food Safety Act of 1999 to improve the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) oversight of imported food. Imported food regulated by FDA is subject to minimal inspection at the border. A 1998 report by the General Accounting Office documented that less than two percent of FDA-regulated imported food is subject to border inspection, down from eight percent in 1992. That trend must be reversed.

Your legislation makes many positive contributions to the debate on how to improve food safety. First, it recognizes that border inspections must be improved to restore Americans' faith in the safety of imported food. That is an important addition to the administration's initiative last year to give FDA inspectors enhanced ability to conduct inspections in foreign countries.

In addition, the legislation recognizes that FDA border inspectors lack essential tools to keep contaminated food off of our supermarket shelves. Real-time tests to check for contaminated food would greatly enhance FDA's import surveillance capabilities. In addition, those tests would be useful in monitoring our existing Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems for meat, poultry, and seafood, and would allow for easier evaluation of new technologies to improve food safety. Focusing research on the development of real-time testing technologies is an important contribution to the discussion of how to improve food safety -- one that will have many future benefits.

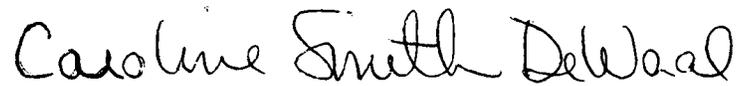
The Imported Food Safety Act of 1999 also contains user fees for imports, an issue that has garnered long-term opposition by many industry and consumer organizations. CSPI believes that a better approach would be to require both domestic and foreign food companies to register with the FDA and to allow the agency to charge a nominal registration fee. That would have the joint benefits of raising revenue and of giving FDA the name and address of every food processor and importer that the agency has an obligation to inspect.



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Page 2

Thank you for your leadership on food safety issues. We hope to work with you in the future on improving the regulation of imported food.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Smith DeWaal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Smith DeWaal  
Director of Food Safety