

Dingell, Stupak Continue Food Safety Investigation as FDA Struggles to Pinpoint Source of Salmonella Outbreak

Washington, DC – Reps. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and Bart Stupak, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, today announced plans to hold a hearing later this month examining the inability of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to identify the cause of the recent national outbreak of salmonella. The hearing will also focus on the Administration's enforcement of the Bioterrorism Act of 2002, which required FDA to establish procedures to trace and track food commodities and maintain accurate chain-of-custody records, as well as proposals developed by several states, in conjunction with growers, to establish traceability systems.

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Committee Leaders Announce Hearing, Plan to Send Investigators to CA to Assess Outbreak's Affects on Growers & Producers

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“Until

FDA has the leadership and resources necessary to keep bad food off our grocery shelves and dining room tables, Americans will continue to be concerned that the food they eat may not always be safe,” said Dingell. “The salmonella outbreak has caused considerable financial losses for the grower and food industries and exposed our vulnerability to a bioterrorism attack. We are working to understand why certain produce commodities, such as tomatoes, are difficult to track and trace and whether our existing system for doing so is adequate.”

FDA

and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that 869 people have been sickened by salmonella since April 10, 2008. FDA originally determined that raw tomatoes caused the outbreak and urged consumers to avoid them. However, yesterday the CDC widened its salmonella investigation to include other fresh produce commonly consumed with tomatoes.

“The FDA’s search for the source of this latest salmonella outbreak has been frustrating for consumers and devastating for the domestic tomato industry,” Stupak said. “If it hasn’t been made abundantly clear through our eight previous food safety hearings, this salmonella outbreak should leave no one doubting that the FDA is broken. We need a modern FDA equipped with not just the financial resources but also the regulatory tools to adequately prevent and respond to future outbreaks.”

In

January 2007, the Committee launched an intensive investigation into the safety of the nation’s food supply that has resulted in seven Congressional hearings and prompted the gathering of information from both the FDA and private companies. As part of this probe, Committee leaders plan to send a staff team to California to investigate the salmonella outbreak. Staff investigators intend to meet with tomato growers and producers to learn how this outbreak is affecting their industry financially and what changes are being considered to improve how tomatoes are grown, distributed, and tracked.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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