

## Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing entitled "Diminished Capacity: Can the FDA Assure the Safety and Security of the Nation's Food Supply? - Part 2"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS HEARING ENTITLED  
"DIMINISHED CAPACITY: CAN THE FDA ASSURE THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF THE NATION'S FOOD  
SUPPLY? - Part 2"  
July 17, 2007

Mr. Chairman, today's hearing could not be timelier. Almost every day brings news of another threat to the public health posed by contaminated food products.

The recent series of tainted food recalls has focused America's attention on the sorry state of Federal oversight of the domestic food supply. Even more disturbing, however, is the virtual abdication by the Food and Drug Administration of oversight or inspection of the ever-increasing flood of imported food.

The reality is that twice the amount of food is imported into the U.S. as 10 years ago.

More than a quarter of all fruit purchased by Americans is imported. More than 80 percent of all seafood consumed in the U.S. is imported. Between 2002 and 2006, FDA-regulated food imports from China rose from approximately 100,000 shipments to nearly 235,000. Experts predict those shipments will reach 300,000 this year.

Yet FDA examines less than 1 percent of these imports and of those imports examined they test only a small fraction. This is unacceptable—especially in light of the horror stories coming out of China such as poisonous melamine in food products, the antifreeze chemical diethylene glycol in toothpaste, and illegal antibiotics and suspected carcinogens in farm-raised shrimp and fish.

Even worse, China recently released a study showing that nearly one-fifth of all food and consumer products sold to its own people are tainted or substandard. Another Chinese Government report describes rivers in China so contaminated with sewage, heavy metals from industrial byproducts, and pesticides that fish farmers have no choice but to use chemicals and antibiotics to keep fish alive.

Since more than 20 percent of U.S. seafood imports come from China, I shudder to think how much of this tainted Chinese seafood has already reached American tables.

How has FDA responded to this increasing threat to American consumers? They want to name a "Food Czar" without giving him any real authority, propose a sweeping reorganization of their field inspection operations, and close some of their most crucial laboratories that expose dangerous imports.

As we will hear from Committee staff, who have interviewed numerous FDA field employees, as well as from a number of witnesses with actual hands-on experience at our Nation's ports, the FDA reorganization proposals will shift critical resources away from ports-of-entry, actions that will in all likelihood worsen our food safety crisis. Further, their proposal will eliminate much of the scarce laboratory expertise currently found at FDA.

The Federal food safety system is in dire need of reform—it is fragmented, understaffed, inefficient, and lagging in state-of-the-art tracking systems. Furthermore, FDA has largely abdicated its regulatory role to the food industry itself, which is expected to police itself.

This must change.

I will soon introduce legislation to address this situation. Among other things, it will provide additional resources and authorities to FDA to ensure that it can effectively monitor and control food and drug imports entering the United States. It will also provide for additional research on effective testing techniques at the border to aid inspectors in identifying adulterated imports.

Let us hope that the senior FDA officials, who comprise our third panel, will today acknowledge the glaring structural deficiencies in the existing food safety regime, stop the dangerous and wasteful reorganization of their field inspection service, and work with us to craft a system truly capable of meeting the challenges of a global food market.

-30-

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515