

May 21, 2007

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Herb Kohl
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Country of Origin Labeling Implementation

Dear Congresswoman DeLauro and Senator Kohl:

The integrity and safety of the nation's food supply is in serious jeopardy with our citizens eating an amalgam of food produced elsewhere, with no idea of its source. It is critically important that our food consumers be provided with information on the source of their food because the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) have not established a food safety inspection system sufficient to deal adequately with the tidal wave of food imports included in our food supply. We therefore urge you to include, in the FY 2008 appropriations bill, sufficient funds for the USDA to immediately implement mandatory country of origin labeling for food.

Representative Rehberg and Senator Thomas have introduced H.R. 357 and S. 404, respectively, to require implementation of mandatory country of origin labeling on red meats and produce by September 30, 2007. The 2002 Farm Bill contained this labeling requirement, but the food processing and meat packing industry was successful in persuading Congress to block implementation. To this day, with the exception of seafood, consumers do not know where their food comes from.

The attached graph (see end of letter) shows food imports more than doubling since 2000, with the percentage of inspections falling by nearly 40%. William Hubbard, a former FDA assistant commissioner who left the agency in 2005 after 27 years, told the New York Times:

“The public thinks the food supply is much more protected than it is,” said William Hubbard, a former associate commissioner. “If people really knew how weak the F.D.A. program is, they would be shocked.”¹

The pet food poisoning scandal has revealed how out-of-control the situation has become. Rice, wheat and corn gluten have been systematically spiked with melamine to falsely increase lab tests for protein, without providing nutrition, and to gain higher market prices for the ingredients. The companies providing the feed were closed and shuttered after FDA inspectors arrived on Chinese shores. The U.S. food industry buys ingredients from China and other countries with food safety programs existing in name only. Mothers and fathers in the U.S. want to feed their

¹ Alexei Barrionuevo, “Food Imports Often Escape Scrutiny,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2007.

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children wholesome and safe food, but cannot do so when the food industry fights origin information.

Our domestic food safety system, with all its flaws, exceeds that of virtually all other countries. The risk of unintentional contamination has become clear. The risk of intentional contamination or food terrorism has been documented in past reports by the Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General.²

You have been diligent in holding hearings to gather information and call attention to the China melamine and imported food problem. The industry's claim that labeling is irrelevant to food safety has now become absurd. Many other countries simply do not have our food production and processing regulatory standards, nor do they have regulatory capacity to enforce even those laws that do exist.

Under the best of circumstances, and with unlimited funds, the FDA and USDA will require years to craft a system to verify the safety of this tsunami-like food import increase through inspection. FDA and USDA cannot remove food from the national supply chain when contamination is discovered. FDA cannot inspect all foreign facilities, and indeed the Chinese have obstructed inspections of their facilities.

Consumers do not want to, and cannot, rely entirely on the government. A meaningful first step is to immediately implement mandatory country of origin labeling for meat and produce. Consumer choice is irrevocably connected with consumer safety. Mandatory country of origin labeling was approved by Congress in 2002, has been implemented successfully for seafood, and should no longer be delayed by special interests. Now is clearly the time to fully implement this measure to provide U.S. consumers with critically important information about the integrity and safety of their food choices.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We will be supportive of your efforts.

Respectfully,

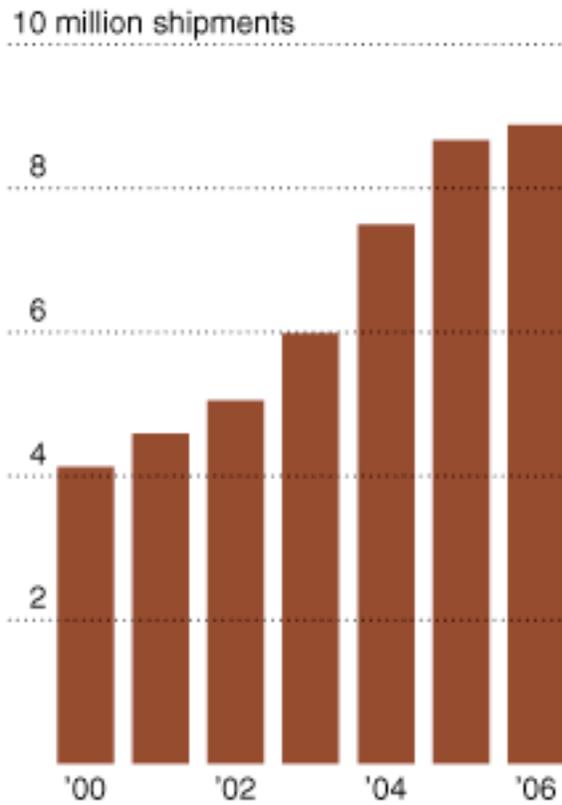
Big Flats Historical Society (NY)
California Coalition for Food and Farming
CASA del Llano, Inc., (TX)
Center for Food Safety
Chemung County Farm Museum (NY)
Church Women United of Chemung County (NY)
Church Women United of NYS (NY)
CitySeed (CT)
Cornucopia Institute (WI)

² "The Department of Homeland Security's Role in Food Defense and Critical Infrastructure Protection," Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, OIG-07-33, February 2007, http://www.dhs.gov/xoig/assets/mgmtrpts/OIG_07-33_Feb07.pdf

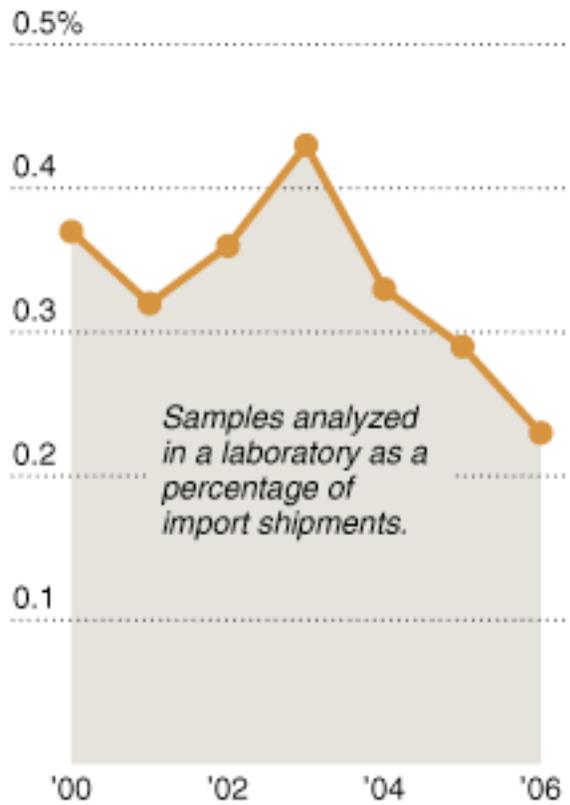
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Court St Joseph #139, Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Corning/Elmira (NY)
Dakota Resource Council (ND)
Diocese of Jefferson City, Social Concerns Office (MO)
Family Farm Defenders (WI)
Farm Aid (MA)
Food & Water Watch
Government Accountability Project
Horseheads Grange #1118, Horseheads NY
Horseheads Historical Society (NY)
Idaho Rural Council (ID)
Iowa Farmers Union (IA)
Kansas City Food Circle (MO)
Ladies of Charity of Chemung County (NY)
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (ME)
Mississippi Contract Poultry Growers Association (MS)
Missouri Organic Association (MO)
National Farmers Organization
National Farmers Union
Nature's International Certification Services (WI)
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (MA)
Northeast Organic Farming Association – CT
Northeast Organic Farming Association – Mass
Northeast Organic Farming Association – NH
Northeast Organic Farming Association – NY
Northeast Organic Farming Association – VT
Ohio Farmers Union (OH)
Organic Consumers Association
Organization for Competitive Markets
Past Regents' Club, Catholic Daughters of the Americas of the Diocese of Rochester (NY)
Pomona Grange #1, Chemung County NY
Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
RAFI-USA
Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America
Small Farm Today (MO)
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
United Church of Christ Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility
Western Organization of Resource Councils
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
World Hunger Year

Food import shipments



Food import inspections



Source: Food and Drug Administration

Reprinted from - "Food Imports Often Escape Scrutiny," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2007,