

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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MEMORANDUM

September 20, 2010

To: Members of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Fr: Committee on Energy and Commerce Staff

Re: Hearing on “The Outbreak of *Salmonella* in Eggs”

On Wednesday, September 22, 2010, at 12:00 p.m. in room 2123 of the Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold a hearing entitled, “The Outbreak of *Salmonella* in Eggs.” This hearing will examine the recent *Salmonella* outbreak associated with shell eggs produced by Wright County Egg and Hillandale Farms of Iowa.

The hearing continues the Subcommittee’s investigative activities concerning the adequacy of efforts to ensure the safety and security of the nation’s food supply. In the 110th Congress, the Subcommittee held nine hearings regarding food safety issues, including an *E. coli* outbreak traced to tainted spinach, melamine-contaminated pet food, and intentional exposure of meat and seafood to carbon monoxide. In this Congress, the Subcommittee has held hearings on a *Salmonella* outbreak associated with peanut products manufactured by the Peanut Corporation of America, the actions and obligations of food manufacturers and retailers that purchase tainted food products, the safety of bottled water, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s management of international food imports and inspections of domestic food facilities.

I. BACKGROUND

Fifteen federal agencies administer at least 30 federal laws concerning food safety. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) are primarily responsible for ensuring the safety of food products. FSIS oversees domestically-produced and imported meat, poultry, and processed egg products; FDA regulates all other foods, including fruits, vegetables, seafood, milk, and eggs.

A. The *Salmonella* Outbreak

In July 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified an outbreak of *Salmonella* Enteritidis infections across the country that began in May 2010.¹ From May 1 through August 31, 2010, a total of 1,469 people reported illnesses that are likely to be associated with this outbreak.² FDA and CDC identified Wright County Egg and Hillandale Farms of Iowa as the potential sources of contaminated shell eggs associated with this outbreak.³

On August 13, 2010, Wright County Egg, located in Galt, Iowa, issued a voluntary recall due to possible contamination of shell eggs with *Salmonella* Enteritidis.⁴ Five days later, the company expanded its recall.⁵ On August 20, 2010, Hillandale Farms of Iowa issued a nationwide voluntary recall of its shell eggs.⁶ Overall, the two companies have voluntarily recalled approximately 550 million eggs due to potential *Salmonella* Enteritidis contamination.⁷

B. The FDA Investigation

FDA investigators inspected multiple facilities of Wright County Egg from August 12 through August 30, 2010.⁸ In the course of their investigation, officials found chicken manure reaching eight feet high, employees who did not wear or change protective clothing when moving from one laying house to another, and many live mice throughout the facilities. Inspectors also observed wild birds sitting near and flying over grain bins that contained chicken feed. In total, six samples taken from the facilities and feed supply tested positive for *Salmonella* Enteritidis.⁹

FDA also inspected facilities of Hillandale Farms of Iowa.¹⁰ During inspections from August 19 through August 26, 2010, investigators found numerous unsealed rodent holes, liquid

¹ Centers for Disease Control, *Investigation Update: Multistate Outbreak of Human Salmonella Enteritidis Infections Associated with Shell Eggs* (Sept. 2, 2010).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Wright County Egg Conducts Nationwide Voluntary Recalls of Shell Eggs Because of Possible Health Risk* (Aug. 13, 2010).

⁵ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Wright County Egg Expands Nationwide Voluntary Recall of Shell Eggs Because of Possible Health Risk* (Aug. 18, 2010).

⁶ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Hillandale Farms of Iowa Conducts Nationwide Voluntary Recall of Shell Eggs Because of Possible Health Risk* (Aug. 20, 2010).

⁷ *Recall expands to more than half a billion eggs*, Associated Press (Aug. 20, 2010).

⁸ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Form FDA 483: Quality Egg LLC* (Aug. 30, 2010).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Form FDA 483: Hillandale Farms of Iowa* (Aug. 26, 2010).

manure “streaming” from a crack in the manure pit, and uncaged hens tracking manure throughout the laying facilities. FDA found *Salmonella* Enteritidis in a sample of spent water from an egg wash station.¹¹

II. WITNESSES

The following witnesses have been invited to testify:

- **Mr. Austin DeCoster**
Owner
Wright County Egg
- **Mr. Orland Bethel**
President
Hillandale Farms of Iowa
- **Mr. Michael R. Taylor**
Deputy Commissioner for Foods
U.S. Food and Drug Administration

¹¹ *Id.*