



April 23, 2007

Dr. Andrew C. von Eschenbach  
Commissioner  
Food and Drug Administration  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, Maryland 20857

**RE: Pet Food Recall Illustrates Need for Ban on Chinese Grain Imports**

Dear Dr. von Eschenbach:

The ever-expanding recall of pet food containing contaminated ingredients from China demonstrates the immediate need for greater controls on imported foods, especially grain products originating from China. In light of the wheat and rice gluten problems, CSPI calls on the Food and Drug Administration to ban all grain imports from China until they can be certified by U.S. inspectors as free of illegal chemical or microbial contamination, including but not limited to pesticides, rat poison, and melamine. In addition, FDA should evaluate if the ban should extend to other foods or ingredients coming into the U.S. from China or any other country.

FDA has received over 14,000 complaints from pet owners and veterinarians regarding the nation's largest ever recall of pet food.<sup>1</sup> Although Dr. Stephen Sundlof recently testified about the implementation of a 100% sampling program for all wheat gluten from China, such a program is inadequate.<sup>2</sup> The protocol must be expanded to include intensive sampling of all grains or food ingredients that could contain illegal substances.

The danger to U.S. consumers from contaminated products is not limited to pets. The wheat gluten and rice flour implicated in the pet food recall are components of the human food supply as well, and contamination of human food on the scale of the pet food outbreak would be disastrous. The state of California has already quarantined a hog farm where hog urine has tested positive for melamine—a result of the ingestion of tainted pet food used for pig feed.<sup>3</sup>

Since FDA does not have programs (as USDA does) to ensure that exporting countries maintain safety systems equivalent to those in the U.S., the risk of tainted products entering the country continues unchecked.<sup>4</sup> While the total size of the pet food outbreak is still unknown, recent reports add yet another troubling aspect to the outbreak, suggesting that Chinese producers may have purposefully added melamine to wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate to create an appearance of enhanced nutritional value.<sup>5</sup> While shocking, such reports are unfortunately not surprising. China's food system has a dangerous and troubled history of food contamination, including the purposeful introduction of rat poison into the human food supply.<sup>6</sup>

Further, the refusal of the Chinese government to allow U.S. inspectors timely access to the plants where the suspect wheat gluten was manufactured is untenable.<sup>7</sup> To better protect

public health and to send a strong message to China and other trading partners that contaminated food will not be accepted by the U.S., FDA should ban imports from any country where its inspectors are denied access to test for pathogens and contaminants.

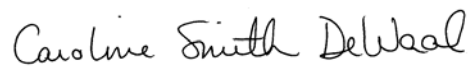
The FDA must take swift and decisive action to protect the U.S. food supply by immediately banning all grain imports from China until FDA inspectors can test and certify that the products are free from illegal substances. The risk to the public is too high and the potential for copy-cat contamination is too great to leave our borders open to potentially harmful food. If U.S. pets must serve as “puppies in the coal mine,” we urge FDA to heed the warning and take action now to ban grains and other food ingredients until the Chinese government and producers can guarantee that these imports are free of illegal and dangerous substances.

While closing the borders to these food imports is a last resort, it is a viable option for FDA, given its current budget shortfall and lack of food inspectors. We hope that the recent litany of food safety problems, from spinach to peanut butter to pet food, provides the impetus for Congress to provide additional resources and authority to conduct in-country evaluations in countries that ship food and ingredients to the U.S. The need is critical.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Center for Science in the Public Interest



Caroline Smith DeWaal  
Director, Food Safety  
Center for Science in the Public Interest

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<sup>1</sup> Food and Drug Administration. “FDA’s Ongoing Pet Food Investigation.” April 16, 2007.

<<http://www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/petfoodrecallup.html>>

<sup>2</sup> Testimony by Stephen F. Sundlof before the Senate Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee on April 12, 2007. <<http://www.fda.gov/ola/2007/petfood041207.html>>

<sup>3</sup> California Department of Food and Agriculture. “New Release: Stanislaus County Hog Farm Quarantined: Melamine Detected in Pig Urine.” April 19, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Schmidt J. “U.S. food imports outrun FDA Resources.” U.S.A. Today. March 18, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Weise E. and Schmidt J. “Melamine in pet food may not be accidental.” U.S.A. Today. April 19, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Croddy E. “Rat poison and food security in the People’s Republic of China: focus on tetramethylene disulfotetramine (tetramine).” *Arch Toxicol.* 2004 Jan; 78(1): 1-6.

<sup>7</sup> Senator Dick Durbin. “Durbin, DeLauro Meet with Von Eschenbach Urge Chinese Government to Cooperate on Pet Food Contamination Investigation.” April 18, 2007. <<http://www.durbin.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=272635>>