

2413 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0703
(202) 225-3861

59 ELM STREET
SECOND FLOOR
NEW HAVEN, CT 06510
(203) 562-3718

DURHAM/MIDDLEFIELD/MIDDLETOWN
(860) 344-1159

WEBSITE: [HTTP://DELAWARE.HOUSE.GOV](http://delaware.house.gov)



UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ROSA L. DELAURO

3RD DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

September 26, 2018

CO-CHAIR, DEMOCRATIC STEERING AND
POLICY COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEES
RANKING MEMBER

LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES
AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write today out of concern regarding the Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) investigation into the ongoing multistate outbreak of *Escherichia coli* O26, which has been linked to ground beef.

At the time of this writing, the outbreak has resulted in two Class I Recalls and caused 18 illnesses, including one death.

According to the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), the Agency was notified of an investigation of *E. coli* O26 illnesses on August 16, 2018. Further investigation implicated ground beef supplied by Cargill Meat Solutions. These ground beef items were produced and packaged on June 21, 2018.

However, it was not until August 30, 2018 that the first recall related to this outbreak was initiated by Publix Super Markets Inc. At that time, according to FSIS, the source of the outbreak was "yet-to-be determined."¹ Then, twenty days later on September 19, 2018, 132,606 pounds of ground beef products from Cargill, the apparent source of the outbreak, were finally recalled.

In total, it was more than thirty-five days from when FSIS first learned of the outbreak to when the traceback investigation was able to identify the source. Such a timeline is simply unacceptable and unnecessarily jeopardizes public health.

However, the negative consequences of prolonged traceback investigations are not just the risks to consumer safety. For years, Economic Research Service (ERS) researchers have highlighted

¹ USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. *Publix Super Markets Inc. Recalls Ground Chuck Products Due To Possible E. coli O26 Contamination*. 30 August 2018. <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/recalls-and-public-health-alerts/recall-case-archive/archive/2018/recall-072-2018-release>

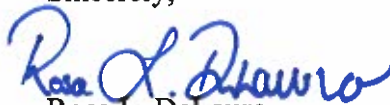
the impact that foodborne illness outbreaks and product recalls have on the agriculture and food sectors. These impacts include declines in product consumption and prices – both of which directly reduce revenues of farmers and ranchers². For example, agricultural economists from Kansas State University found that consumer demand for ground beef was significantly reduced by beef *E. coli* recalls³. Foodborne outbreaks and recalls have real impacts that affect the entire supply chain – from food retailers all the way back to the farm.

Therefore, with respect to the aforementioned traceback investigation, I respectfully ask for specific, written responses to the following questions:

1. What is USDA-FSIS's opinion on the duration of the traceback investigation related to this outbreak? Does the Agency have a record on the length of previous traceback investigations? If so, what has been the average length of previous traceback investigations for previous years?
2. After being notified of the *E. coli* O26 investigation on August 16, 2018, on what specific date did USDA-FSIS learn that traceback information implicated product sold by Publix Super Markets? On what specific date did USDA-FSIS learn that traceback information implicated Cargill Meat Solutions as the supplier?
3. Over the course of this investigation, what specific traceback information did USDA-FSIS, and/or its partners, request from Publix Super Markets? What specific traceback information did USDA-FSIS, and/or its partners, request from Cargill and/or other suppliers and distributors?
 - a. Please provide specific dates for when this information was requested.
4. What specific traceback information did USDA-FSIS, and/or its partners, receive from Public Super Markets, Cargill, and other suppliers/distributors, respectfully.
 - a. Please provide specific dates for when this information was obtained.
 - b. Please provide what format this information was obtained in.

Should you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Christian Lovell (christian.lovell@mail.house.gov) of my staff at (202) 225-3661.

Sincerely,



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

CC: Carmen Rottenberg, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety

² USDA Economic Research Service. *Economic Incentives to Supply Safe Chicken to the National School Lunch Program*. November 2015. https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/45500/55537_err202.pdf?v=42332.

³ Shang, Xia and Glynn T. Tonsor, (May 2017). *Food safety recalls effects across meat products and regions*.