

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 9, 2014

The Honorable Mr. Brian Ronholm
Acting Under Secretary for Food Safety
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250-3700

Dear Acting Under Secretary Ronholm,

We remain deeply troubled by last week's Foster Farms' Class I recall of "an undetermined amount" of chicken products that may be contaminated with a strain of *Salmonella* Heidelberg.

Last October we called on Foster Farms to stop shipping meat until food safety problems were resolved. At the time over 400 people had been sickened by Foster Farms raw chicken products. Since then more than 200 more people have gotten sick from the products continuing to come out of the three plants involved. Almost 40 percent of the 621 known cases have resulted in hospitalization due to the antibiotic-resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg that contaminated the Foster Farms chicken. Of note, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), for every one case of *Salmonella* that is reported, 29 cases go unreported, which means as many as 18,000 people may have already fallen ill from this outbreak.

While the *Salmonella* rate may be down to 2 percent in the Foster Farms facilities, the fact is that people are continuing to get extremely ill. In this case, it is clear that the presence of a dangerous strain matters more than the overall rate. *Salmonella* Heidelberg is resistant to several commonly prescribed antibiotics, resulting in the high hospitalization rates for infected individuals.

We find it outrageous that nearly a year and a half has gone by before a recall has been issued. It is unacceptable to push the responsibility of food safety solely on the consumer. Research clearly shows that telling consumers to avoid cross-contamination and use a meat thermometer is not enough to increase these behaviors. Therefore, the responsibility must fall on the producers, especially when the product has been contaminated with such a virulent strain.

FSIS and Foster Farms instead need to go to the source. To that end, we call on FSIS to:

- Halt operations at Foster Farms plants until the source of the contamination is identified and eliminated.
- Release information on exactly which strains of *Salmonella* are represented in the 2% rate and identify which of those strains are antibiotic resistant.
- Work with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Foster Farms to investigate the live chickens raised for these three plants and the chicken hatcheries providing chicks in order to determine the source of the contamination.

The buck should not stop with consumers. FSIS needs to take responsibility for consumers' safety, and not bow to the will of industry, which is most concerned with profits. It is dumbfounding that FSIS is allowing Foster Farms to keep their plants open when they clearly cannot resolve the problem and are continuing to sell products that are a threat to public health. While Foster Farms purports that it has spent over \$75 million to address the food safety concerns, we lack confidence that it has turned the situation around. We urge FSIS to take swift and strong action to protect the public health.

Sincerely,


Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress


Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress