

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

October 16, 2013

The Honorable Dr. Thomas Frieden
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Frieden:

We write to express our deep concern with the ongoing outbreaks due to *Salmonella* associated with raw chicken products produced by Foster Farms. We are particularly troubled that there was an investigation into an outbreak of *Salmonella* Heidelberg that identified Foster Farms brand chicken as the most likely source of an outbreak beginning in 2012, but no action was taken and, tragically, a second outbreak occurred this year.

On July 10, 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) determined that the first outbreak, which began in 2012, was over. A total of 134 people were infected, with 31 percent hospitalized, as a result of the outbreak emanating out of two Foster Farms' facilities. Yet, a contaminated product was never recalled.

Last week, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) issued a public health alert due to concerns that illness, once again caused by strains of *Salmonella* Heidelberg, are associated with raw chicken product produced by three other Foster Farms' facilities. At the time of the alert, an estimated 278 illnesses had been reported in 18 states, with reports indicating that roughly 42 percent of the people with illness have been hospitalized.

As of October 11, 2013, a total of 317 people infected with seven outbreak strains of *Salmonella* Heidelberg have been reported from 20 states and Puerto Rico. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, since July 1 of this year FSIS and CDC have been investigating this new outbreak that began in March, just nine days before CDC published its report on the first outbreak.

As you know, while CDC has no regulatory authority with regard to food safety, it does play the lead role in detecting multi-state outbreaks of foodborne illness. Accordingly, we respectfully request that you answer the following questions regarding CDC's role in the two *Salmonella* outbreaks emanating from raw chicken products produced at Foster Farms facilities:

1. What conclusions did CDC reach with regard to the first outbreak of *Salmonella* Heidelberg involving two Foster Farms poultry facilities? Do you believe that every possible measure was taken to prevent this outbreak from occurring? How close were you to determining the exact product that contributed to that outbreak?

2. With regard to the illnesses associated with the recent outbreak that began in March 2013, why did it take until July to identify poultry products from Foster Farms that caused the illnesses?
3. We have now experienced two major *Salmonella* outbreaks involving Foster Farms. Are you concerned about a significant increase in further illness associated with the recent outbreak and the potential for a third outbreak?
4. As a result of the shutdown, CDC had to furlough roughly two-thirds of its staff, though we understand a relatively small number of furloughed employees were brought back to deal with urgent needs. What impact is the government shutdown having on CDC's surveillance capabilities, including systems such as PulseNet, and its ability to identify and respond to the most recent outbreak?
5. We are deeply concerned about the negative impact budget reductions, including those due to sequestration, are having on CDC's ability to complete investigations into outbreaks such as these two. CDC funding has been cut by roughly \$1 billion since 2010. The actual amount of funds allocated have come nowhere near meeting the level of funding requested to enhance CDC's food safety efforts through the use of modern techniques for identifying and characterizing pathogens involved in foodborne illness and other infectious diseases. What impact has this lack of necessary resources had on CDC's ability to conduct foodborne illness investigations such as these two?
6. You requested an increase of \$23.5 million in your FY14 budget for food safety improvements, along with \$40 million for an Advanced Molecular Detection initiative. Please describe the importance of this funding request to enhance CDC's ability to promptly and effectively investigate outbreaks such as these two.
7. What measures would CDC recommend be taken to reduce the time that foodborne illness investigations take and what additional resources would you need to implement those measures, including improving and modernizing surveillance systems?

An outbreak of food-borne illness on the scale of that reported by the CDC in July is undoubtedly disconcerting to the American public. A second outbreak emanating from the same company is wholly unacceptable, and we need to ensure our public health agencies are able to quickly and adequately respond to such incidents.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and for your prompt response.

Sincerely,



ROSA L. DeLAURO
Member of Congress



LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER
Member of Congress