

Washington, DC - One week after requesting a list from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of all the retailers in the country who received shipments of meat that was part of the largest recall in U.S. history, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today demanded that the agency make the list public or face congressional action to compel its release. During a hearing last week before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, of which Hinchey is a member, the congressman asked FSIS Under Secretary Richard Raymond to make the list of more than 10,000 retailers who received part of the 143 million pounds of recalled beef public by the middle of this week. Raymond said he would look into the possibility of doing so, but indicated the Bush administration viewed that information as proprietary and was against the release of names.

"If meat is determined to be unfit for consumption it is critical that the public be informed where it has been sold in order to determine the risk to themselves and their families," Hinchey wrote in a letter sent today to Raymond. "That the administration would put the interests of business above that of the health and welfare of every American is as appalling as the inhumane practices that led to this situation. I once again call upon you and this administration to do everything in your power to immediately release this critically important list. The public is depending on your cooperation and expects it as much as I do. Failure to comply may ultimately result in the use of Congress' legislative and appropriating authority to compel the release of that information."

Last month, the USDA ordered the recall of 143 million pounds of beef that came from a meatpacking plant owned by Westland/Hallmark Meat Company after undercover video footage by the Humane Society of the United States showed flagrant abuses of animal welfare and that the company processed meat from cattle that were too weak or sick to stand up on their own. Concerns over the safety of consuming meat from such cattle prompted the recall.

At last week's hearing, Raymond told Hinchey that there were more than 10,000 consignees that had received the recalled meat and an even greater number of retailers and schools selling it. Raymond said that he thought releasing the list of names was a good idea, but that President Bush's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) opposed doing so. Hinchey requested the list of names by mid-week and vowed to put serious pressure on FSIS if it failed to do so. Today's letter is the first step by Hinchey to keep pressure on FSIS in light of the agency's decision to still not make the list of retailers public.

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The full text of the letter follows:

March 14, 2008

Under Secretary Richard Raymond

Food Safety and Inspection Service

United States Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Ave., S.W.

Washington, DC 20250

Under Secretary Raymond:

Thank you for your testimony during the food safety hearing on March 6, which was held by the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies. I am writing to follow up regarding our conversation about the recent beef recall and the significant public safety implications.

As you know, 143 million pounds of beef was recalled in conjunction with practices at a

meatpacking plant owned by Westland/Hallmark Meat Company. In January, I wrote to Agriculture Secretary Schafer, along with my colleagues, urging a full investigation into the matter. During our discussion on March 6, you said that there were over 10,000 consignees that had received the recalled meat and an even greater total number of retailers, including schools, that may have further sold or served the recalled meat. I was disappointed to learn that you were unable to provide the names of those retailers due to the president's Office of Management and Budget, which considers that information to be "proprietary." In the interest of public health, I requested the names of those businesses and any businesses that have received and potentially sold the recalled meat by the middle of this week. To date, I have not received a response.

If meat is determined to be unfit for consumption it is critical that the public be informed where it has been sold in order to determine the risk to themselves and their families. That the administration would put the interests of business above that of the health and welfare of every American is as appalling as the inhumane practices that led to this situation. I once again call upon you and this administration to do everything in your power to immediately release this critically important list. The public is depending on your cooperation and expects it as much as I do. Failure to comply may ultimately result in the use of Congress' legislative and appropriating authority to compel the release of that information.

I sincerely appreciate your assistance and respectfully request that you provide an appropriate response as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey