

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 22, 2011

CONTACT: Kaelan Richards
(202) 225-3661

DELAURO CALLS FOR FDA TESTING OF IMPORTED JAPANESE FOODS

Cites concerns over recent radiation findings in Japanese produce

Washington, DC— Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (CT-3), Ranking Member on the Labor, Education, Health, and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee, sent a letter to Margaret Hamburg, Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, today expressing concern about potential health risks associated with food products imported from Japan in the wake of last week's earthquake and tsunami damage to the Fukushima nuclear reactor.

The text of the letter appears below.

March 22, 2011

Margaret Hamburg, M.D.
Commissioner
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
10903 New Hampshire Ave
Silver Spring, MD 20993-0002

Dear Dr. Hamburg:

I am writing to express concern about the recent developments surrounding the potential health risks associated with imported food products from Japan. As you are aware, radiation has been found in spinach and milk at farms in Japan located near the damaged Fukushima nuclear reactor. Because the Food and Drug Administration does not track where food production facilities are located in other countries, I strongly urge the agency to act swiftly to set aside for radiological testing all food imports from Japan.

The World Health Organization has urged Japan to act quickly to ban food sales from areas surrounding the Fukushima nuclear plant if the food is found to contain excessive levels of radiation. As you know, and as the WHO reminded us, radiation in food can accumulate in the body and pose a greater risk to health than radioactive particles in the air. This is why it is critical that the FDA take every precaution necessary to ensure that any contaminated foods reach the U.S.

Last week, the FDA announced that it was working on steps to ensure that imported foods from Japan were safe, and developing a monitoring strategy that may include increased and targeted product sampling at the border. Regarding FDA's announcement, please respond to the following questions:

The FDA has announced that the nuclear plant crisis in Japan has so far posed no risk to the U.S. food supply. How is the agency able to make this determination with such certainty? Is it based on radiological testing conducted at ports of entry?

The agency also indicated last week that it is closely monitoring food products from Japan as a precaution. What specific steps were taken to scrutinize the monitoring of these food products?

If radiological testing is being conducted by FDA, how is it being done? Are import inspectors capable of doing this at the ports of entry or are products being sent to FDA laboratories?

How is FDA coordinating with the Department of Homeland Security on this issue?

The FDA's new risk-based screening system for imports, Predictive Risk-Based Evaluation for Dynamic Import Compliance Targeting (PREDICT), is supposed to assist entry reviewers in targeting higher-risk shipments for examination. Has PREDICT been programmed to flag all imports from Japan for radiological testing?

How would the budget cuts proposed in H.R. 1 impact FDA's ability to scrutinize imported food products from Japan? Would imposing the cuts result in less radiological testing of food at ports of entry?

Thank you for your attention to this very critical issue. I look forward to the responses to these questions.

Sincerely,

ROSA L. DeLAURO

Ranking Member

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

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