

The Contamination of Pet Food and Some Frightening Revelations

Recent months have proven to be nothing short of an evolving period of crisis for the American food industry, dealing first of all with the nightmare of contaminated spinach. Soon afterwards, deadly microbes began showing up in peanut butter, of all things. And, then came the contamination of tomatoes and imported melons. But, this latest outbreak, involving tainted pet food has not only contributed to the illness or death of reportedly thousands of family pets, more importantly, it's revealed a food safety system in America that's remarkably dysfunctional.

Confidence in the FDA couldn't be lower. What we've depended upon to be our first line of defense in protecting the safety of our food has instead revealed itself as an agency that's chronically under-funded and forced to utilize severely outdated methods of scientific research and analysis. But, even more disappointing is the realization that it actually has very little enforcement authority, even within its own poorly structured regulatory framework. So, it comes as no real surprise that today's "post 911" FDA is only geared toward reacting to situations, with nothing in place to stop them from occurring in the first place.

Former FDA chief, Dr. David Kessler in testimony before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, was quoted as saying "We have no structure for preventing food-borne illness in this country. The reality is that there is currently no mandate, no leadership, no resources, nor scientific research base for prevention of food safety problems. There is no one in the executive branch with the clout and Authority to prevent food-borne illness".

Many argue that we're using our pets as guinea pigs, testing the safety of ingredients and unknown additives imported for the production of pet foods. The greater concern should be that much of those same ingredients are finding their way into foods consumed by us humans. Not surprisingly, I have an increasing lack of confidence in the suggestions of "experts" or food labels advocating "Safe For Human Consumption". Precisely who is it that I'm supposed to trust?

As concerned Americans, this has to be our wake-up call. It's time to strengthen the FDA's ability to ensure the safety of our food supply by providing the desperately needed resources and by unifying and elevating food safety leadership between the FDA and the Department of Health and Human Services. It's time to once and for all put an end to the growing number of high profile, and deadly breakdowns in the nation's food inspection system.

We can't bring back the beloved pets we've lost, as a result of the current lack of oversight, but we can take measures to prevent the tragic consequences of future outbreaks. Our message to Congress should be that it's no longer "ok" to rely on a broken system with the embarrassing capacity to inspect only 1 to 2 percent of our increasing levels of cheap imported food products. And, we need action now, before our concerns once again, begin to erode with the passing of time.

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Harry Monell is a concerned dog owner and enthusiast focusing on the need to provide helpful and timely information regarding the care, development and safety of the family dog. He's devoting time writing helpful articles and maintaining [Wag Central](#), a website all about dogs.