

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Jean Halloran, Consumers Union, 914-378-2457
Erin Williams, The Humane Society of the United States, 301-721-6446
Joe Mendelson, Center for Food Safety, 202- 547-9359
John Bianchi, Goodman Media, 212-576-2700

FARM BILL COULD HAMSTRING STATE FOOD SAFETY AGENCIES

Consumer, Environmental, Farmer and Animal Welfare Groups Protest Clause that Wipes Out State and Local Authority on Meat, Poultry, Biotechnology

Washington, June 19, 2007—Forty consumer, environmental, farmer and animal welfare groups today announced their opposition to a sweeping provision in the 2007 Farm Bill that wipes out critical state and local authority to protect food safety, the environment, and humane animal treatment. The provision, Section 123 of Title I, was quietly inserted in the House bill several weeks ago by the Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Subcommittee.

Consumers Union, the Sierra Club, the Humane Society of the United States, the Center for Food Safety, the Union of Concerned Scientists and three dozen other organizations today called for deletion of Section 123, in a letter sent today to the House Agriculture Committee. The full Committee will hold its mark up of the 2007 Farm Bill later this month.

“At a time when we have seen repeated food safety failures at FDA and USDA, we need more food safety protection, not less,” states Jean Halloran, Director of Food Policy Initiatives at Consumers Union (publisher of Consumer Reports). “This clause would tie the hands of states on meat, poultry and genetically engineered food,” she said.

Section 123 would prevent states and localities from passing any laws prohibiting commercial use of USDA-inspected products. “This could prevent a local health inspector at a supermarket from condemning rodent-contaminated meat or poultry that has begun to go bad,” states Jean Halloran.

“Section 123 will subvert the principles of federalism and states’ rights,” states Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States. “If this appalling and outrageous measure is approved, agribusiness will accomplish what it could not achieve in state legislatures – the evisceration of state laws to protect horses from slaughter and a raft of other democratically approved animal welfare reforms.”

Section 123 would also get in the way of state laws on biotechnology. No state could prohibit use in commerce of a product that USDA has determined is “non-regulated.” Both supporters and opponents of the measure agree that this refers to genetically engineered crops, which USDA “deregulates” after considering whether they might be a plant pest. “California, Arkansas and Missouri have passed laws creating state committees that review whether genetically engineered rice should be grown in the state,” notes Joe Mendelson, Legal Director of the Center for Food Safety. “These laws, which farmers support, would be preempted.”

“This poorly conceived provision should be dropped immediately,” states Mendelson. “Just in the last several months we have seen problems with melamine in animal feed and ground beef contaminated with E. coli. Section 123 takes us backwards by removing existing protections we have at the state and local level. We need increased, not decreased food safety efforts,” he said.

The forty groups signing onto the letter include:

American Humane
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
California Certified Organic Farmers
Californians for GE-Free Agriculture
Campaign for Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food
Center for Environmental Health
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Food Safety
Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Consumers Union
Consumer Federation of America
Edmonds Institute
Equal Exchange
Farm Sanctuary
Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc.
Food and Water Watch
Government Accountability Project
Health Care Without Harm
The Humane Society of the United States
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Institute for a Sustainable Future
Minnesota COACT (Citizens Organized Acting Together)
Minnesota Food Association
National Catholic Rural Life Conference, National Consumers League
National Environmental Trust
National Organic Coalition
Organic Consumers Association,
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
Public Citizen
Safe Tables Our Priority (STOP)
Safe Alternatives for our Forest Environment
Say No To GMOs
Sierra Club
Society for Animal Protective Legislation,
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Union of Concerned Scientists,
Washington Biotechnology Action Council
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group

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• Californians for GE-Free Agriculture • Campaign for Labeling of Genetically Engineered Food • Center for Environmental Health •
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention • Center for Food Safety • Citizens Campaign for the Environment • Consumers
Union • Consumer Federation of America • Edmonds Institute • Equal Exchange • Farm Sanctuary • Florida Certified Organic
Growers and Consumers, Inc. • Food and Water Watch • Government Accountability Project • Health Care Without Harm • The
Humane Society of the United States • Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy • Institute for a Sustainable Future • Minnesota
COACT (Citizens Organized Acting Together) • Minnesota Food Association • National Catholic Rural Life Conference • National
Consumers League • National Environmental Trust • National Organic Coalition • Organic Consumers Association • Physicians for
Social Responsibility • Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine • Public Citizen • Safe Tables Our Priority (STOP) • Safe
Alternatives for our Forest Environment • Say No To GMOs • Sierra Club • Society for Animal Protective Legislation • Southern
Sustainable Agriculture Working Group • Union of Concerned Scientists • Washington Biotechnology Action Council • Western
Sustainable Agriculture Working Group •

June 19, 2007

Honorable Collin Peterson, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear Chairman Peterson:

The forty undersigned consumer, environmental, farmer, and animal welfare groups are writing to express our strong opposition to Section 123, Title I, of the Chairman's Mark, under the jurisdiction of the Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Subcommittee, in the 2007 Farm Bill. Section 123 is a sweeping provision that would summarily wipe out important food safety, farmer, and animal welfare protections in place in states and municipalities across the nation. It usurps powers traditionally exercised by states and localities to protect public health, insure humane treatment of animals, and establish agricultural policies and programs that benefit the state environment and economy.

At a time when the country is facing heightened safety threats from food imports, when new food production technologies are being introduced that are not addressed by existing federal laws, and when federal food safety programs are suffering from the cumulative impact of many years of staff and budget cuts, there is an increasing burden on state and local regulators to keep our food safe. Section 123 would prohibit state and local officials from addressing many threats.

Section 123, titled "EFFECT OF USDA INSPECTION AND DETERMINATION OF NON-REGULATED STATUS," states:

"Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no State or locality shall make any law prohibiting the use in commerce of an article that the Secretary of Agriculture has—

- (1) inspected and passed; or
- (2) determined to be of non-regulated status."

The first clause, related to inspected products, would appear to make it impossible for a local restaurant inspector or public health official to remove rodent-contaminated or temperature-abused meat and poultry products from the market. (The clause clearly states that once a product is inspected or approved by USDA, no local law may prohibit its sale for any reason.) State departments of agriculture that do their own surveillance of packaged USDA-approved meat and poultry products for listeria could also be prevented from

prohibiting the sale of any contaminated product, despite the potential for such products to cause miscarriages and stillbirths in pregnant women, and fatal infections in infants and people taking cancer drugs.

The first clause also would negate state and local laws designed to meet particular concerns about animal welfare. For example, Texas, Oklahoma, Illinois, and California have prohibited the slaughter of horses for human food, and California and the city of Chicago have prohibited sale of foie gras because of concerns about the force-feeding of birds required to produce it. Citizens should retain the right to act at the state and local level to prohibit activities within their borders that they deem too inhumane.

Further, the second clause would negate state and local laws designed to protect the economic interests of farmers, the health of consumers, and the environment, in relation to genetically engineered crops. The clause would bar states from putting any restrictions on use in commerce of a USDA product declared to be “non-regulated.” This designation is given to genetically engineered crops that USDA has determined are not plant pests. However, USDA does not make any determination as to whether such crops are safe for human consumption or whether they are good for the economic interests of a particular state’s farmers. Due to concerns about lack of acceptance of genetically engineered crops in export markets, as well as a number of contamination incidents, the states of California, Arkansas and Missouri have passed laws creating state committees that review whether genetically engineered rice should be grown in their state and/or establish specific restrictions on growing. Minnesota prohibits the growing of any genetically engineered crop without a state review. The state of Washington has enacted a law prohibiting genetically engineered varieties in certain brassica production zones. These state statutes and others designed to protect farmers’ market access would be preempted by Section 123’s second clause.

Given the problems just in the last two months with melamine-contaminated animal feed from China being fed to hogs and chickens, with listeria in cooked chicken in New York, and with E. coli in ground beef in California, this is the wrong time to usurp the right of states and localities to protect their citizens. We need more food safety protection, not less. The ability of states to respond to the views of their citizens regarding the growing of GMOs and animal welfare issues also must not be impaired. Because of these extremely far reaching effects of Section 123, we urge that it be removed from the 2007 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

American Humane

Colleen Bednarz, Program Coordinator
California Certified Organic Farmers

Craig Winters, Executive Director
Campaign for Labeling of Genetically
Engineered Food

Charles Margulis
Food Program Coordinator
Center for Environmental Health

Cori A. Menkin, Senior Director
Government Affairs & Public Policy
American Society for the Prevention of
Cruelty to Animals

Renata Brillinger, Director
Californians for GE-Free Agriculture

Patricia Buck, Executive Director
Center for Foodborne Illness Research
& Prevention

Joe Mendelson III, Legal Director
Center for Food Safety

Jean Halloran, Director
Food Policy Initiatives
Consumers Union

Beth Burrows, President/Director
Edmonds Institute

Gene Baur, President
Farm Sanctuary

Wenonah Hauter, Executive Director
Food and Water Watch

Jamie Harvie, Food Coordinator
Health Care Without Harm

Jim Harkness, President
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Glen Hill, Executive Director
Minnesota Food Association

Linda Golodner, President
National Consumers League

National Organic Coalition

Catherine Thomasson, MD, President
Physicians for Social Responsibility

Laura MacCleery, Director, Congress Watch
Public Citizen

Susan Hope Bower, Projects Director
Safe Alternatives for our Forest Environment

Laurel Hopwood, Chair
Genetic Engineering Committee
Sierra Club

Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director
Citizens Campaign for the Environment

Christopher Waldrop, Director
Food Policy Institute
Consumer Federation of America

Keith Olcott, Certification Coordinator
Equal Exchange

Marty Mesh, Executive Director
Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc

Jacqueline Ostfeld, Food and Drug Safety Officer
Government Accountability Project

Wayne Pacelle, President and CEO
The Humane Society of the United States

Institute for a Sustainable Future

Don Pylkkanen, Executive Director
Minnesota COACT (Citizens Organized Acting
Together)

Timothy J. Kautza, Executive Director (interim)
National Catholic Rural Life Conference

Andy Igrejas, Environmental Health Program Director
National Environmental Trust

Ronnie Cummins, National Director
Organic Consumers Association

Neal Barnard, President
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

Nancy Donley, President
Safe Tables Our Priority (STOP)

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Cathy Liss, Legislative Director
Society for Animal Protective Legislation

Archer H. Christian, Executive Director
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group

Margaret Mellon, Director of the Food
& Environment Program
Union of Concerned Scientists

Philip L. Bereano, Professor Emeritus
Washington University
Washington Biotechnology Action Council

Jill Davies, Director
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working
Group

cc: Members, Committee on Agriculture
US House of Representatives

For more information contact:

Jean Halloran, CU -- 914-378-2457, hallje@consumer.org

Joe Mendelson, CFS -- 202-547-9359 joemend@icta.org

Mimi Brody, HSUS – 202-955-3667 mbrody@hsus.org