

**FLEXNEWS****:. Food Industry News****Poor Records Slow Food Probes - U.S. Watchdog**

Source: Reuters

27/03/2009

Washington, March, 27, 2009 - Many U.S. food handlers do not maintain proper records to track products such as milk and oatmeal, making it hard to identify the source of a food-borne outbreak, a government investigator said Thursday.

**Daily News Alerts****Sign Up**

- We respect your privacy -

The U.S. food supply system has come under scrutiny in the wake of high-profile recalls. In the latest outbreak some 700 people became ill after eating salmonella-contaminated peanut products, leading to the largest food recall in U.S. history.

A review by the inspector general's office in the Health and Human Services Department found 59 percent of foodmakers, transporters, warehouses, retailers and other facilities in the study failed to meet requirements to keep records about sources, recipients and transporters of food.

A quarter of the firms were unaware they were required to do so by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), according to the review, which was based on a traceback test of 40 products, including milk, oatmeal and leafy vegetables.

"These findings demonstrate that more needs to be done to protect public health and to ensure the FDA has the necessary resources and tools to respond to a food emergency," Daniel Levinson, the inspector general at HHS, told a House of Representatives Appropriations subcommittee.

"These factors would also limit FDA's ability to respond quickly and effectively to a food emergency," he said.

The traceback test found in most cases the facility that "likely" handled the product was identified. Five items were traced throughout the entire supply chain, while investigators had trouble identifying who handled four of the products.

The Bioterrorism Act of 2002 requires produce processors and distributors to keep track of where food goes and has arrived from, enabling the FDA to use the records to track a product when there is a serious health threat.

Restaurants and farms are not covered by this requirement.

The pitfalls of the system were exposed last year when health officials took months to find the source of a salmonella outbreak. After first pointing to tomatoes as the source, the strain was later identified as coming from Mexican peppers.

The FDA defended that investigation, saying the process was delayed by poor record-keeping and delays checking paperwork. But critics called for a national tracking system.

"Traceability today is simply not good enough," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, chairwoman of the House Appropriations

subcommittee that oversees the FDA.

"It's inconsistent, unreliable and these findings confirm, what many in Congress already believe: That we need to do better," said DeLauro, who has introduced a bill that would improve food supply tracking.

Requiring a firm that handles a food product to maintain records of every facility or farm that handled the product and allowing the FDA to request a firm's record any time are among recommendations made by Levinson to strengthen the system.

Food groups told Congress they supported a tracking system but using technology acceptable to the industry.

The United Fresh Produce Association, which represents 1,500 companies, is working on a coding system to track produce across the supply chain. Tracking programs are used by some produce firms, but they are voluntary and different.

"We ask that Congress set the goal that we need to achieve, not mandate the process," said Tom Stenzel, the association's president.



FLEXNEWS - Business News for the Food Industry

[About Us](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

