

December 20, 2013

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20010

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

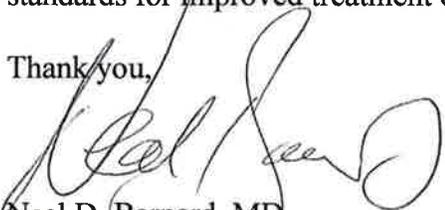
I am writing to voice my support for the petition submitted on behalf of Farm Sanctuary and the Animal Welfare Institute calling on USDA to regulate practices and actions that result in adulterated poultry products. Adulterated poultry products represent a serious threat to public health and sicken thousands of Americans every year. We agree with the petitioners that USDA must fulfill its mandate to promulgate regulations to limit the abuse of poultry which results in adulterated meat.

Last year the Physicians Committee tested chicken products sold by fifteen grocery store chains in ten U.S. cities for the presence of fecal bacteria, finding that 48 percent of chicken samples tested positive. Consumer Reports recently found that of 300 raw chicken breasts sampled from retail stores across the country, 97 percent were contaminated with at least one form of harmful bacteria. A June 2013 Consumer Reports analysis indicated that over 90% of ground turkey samples tested positive for one or more dangerous pathogens. According to the CDC, poultry accounted for the most foodborne illness-related deaths (19 percent) from 1998 to 2008. Nearly one in six Americans become ill due to foodborne diseases each year – many of these diseases originate in contaminated poultry. The most recent outbreaks of salmonella, linked to chicken consumption, have so far sickened at least 389 people and sent 40% of those infected to the hospital.

Imagine if the toy industry was held to the same low standards and over 90 percent of its products contained lead, sickening thousands of children every year. The uncurbed threat to public health posed by adulterated meat products should be similarly unacceptable.

It is clear that neither USDA nor poultry producers prioritize consumer health. Because it has not regulated against the abuse of birds at poultry plants – which contributes to this epidemic of foodborne illness – the Food Safety Inspection Service is failing to protect consumers from deadly diseases. I urge you to heed the recommendations outlined in the petition and promptly establish and begin to enforce standards for improved treatment of animals at poultry plants.

Thank you,



Neal D. Barnard, MD
President
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine