



Congressman Doc Hastings
Statement for the Record, H.R. 2749
July 31, 2009

Madame Speaker, I rise today in opposition to H.R. 2749, the Food Safety Enhancement Act. This bill makes drastic changes to our nation's food safety laws that will affect every farmer and rancher in the United States. However, Madame Speaker, the extent of these changes is unknown, because the full text of this bill was not yet available to Members until the day before the vote.

Our nation has the safest food supply in the world, Madame Speaker, and that is because our growers and processors work hard to provide quality products to consumers. While the circumstances surrounding recent food safety violations must be addressed, in nearly every case, these were violations of existing laws and standards. It is imperative that Congress does not rush to use these incidents as an excuse to unnecessarily and dramatically expand federal regulation of our producers and processors.

This is a better bill than the one that came out of the Energy and Commerce Committee. Yet, I am still concerned about the broad authority this legislation gives to the Food and Drug Administration to regulate on-farm practices for our fruit and vegetable growers. If this bill is signed into law, the FDA will for the first time have the explicit authority to regulate the way produce is grown and harvested.

I am also concerned, Madame Speaker, with the significant financial burden that the new traceability and record-keeping requirements will have on America's small farmers and agriculture processors. This bill would allow FDA to charge huge fines for even minor paperwork violations that could put smaller operations out of business.

Also of note, is the broad quarantine authority that this bill gives to FDA. While I recognize the need to quarantine the source of food-borne illnesses, this bill would allow the FDA to quarantine wide geographic areas where the source may exist. We know that the FDA can make mistakes over the origin of an outbreak, and this provision could cause devastating economic impacts to growers and processors who have done absolutely nothing wrong.

Agriculture is the number one industry in Washington State. Creating jobs and growing our economy is dependent upon supporting our farmers and ranchers – not passing legislation that could put them out of business.

I have heard some of my colleagues say that we can rely on the Senate to address the flaws in this bill. I believe that the House of Representatives owes it to our growers and processors to take the time to do this right, and not rely on the Senate to fix our mistakes. I yield back the balance of my time.