

Food Safety Alert – 2/27/07

CNN is reporting that food safety inspections by the FDA have dropped by 47 percent in the last three years. In that same time period, there are 12 percent fewer FDA employees in field offices who specialize in food safety. This according to a database analysis of federal records done by the Associated Press. And, based upon the FDA's own records, safety tests for food produced in the US have fallen almost 75 percent.

After September 11, Congress increased the number of inspectors and inspections fearing terrorism aimed at our food supply. It peaked in 2003, but has steadily declined since then. "The only difference is now it's worse, because there are more inspections to do -- more facilities -- and more food coming into America, which requires more inspections," said Tommy Thompson, who as secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services pushed to increase the numbers. He's now part of a coalition lobbying to turn around several years of stagnant spending." The Bush administration has included an additional \$10 million in spending for the FDA in its 2008 budget, but Thompson feels it should be 10 times that amount.

"A recent Government Accountability Office report noted that most of the \$1.7 billion the federal government allocates to food safety goes to the Agriculture Department, which is responsible for regulating about 20 percent of the food supply. The FDA, responsible for most of the other 80 percent, gets about 24 percent of the total."

Michael Doyle, director of the Center for Food Safety at the University of Georgia, says the coming threat is America's appetite for imported foods. "The United States last year imported about \$10 billion more in food, feed and beverages than it exported, according to Census figures. Even as imports grow in volume and diversity, the number of FDA inspections is shrinking: agency inspectors physically examined just 1.3 percent of food imports last year, about three-quarters as much as in 2003."

<http://www.cnn.com/2007/HEALTH/02/26/food.safety.ap/>