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*Food Safety Enforcement Enhancement Act of 1997:  
Putting Public Health before the Meat Industry's Bottom Line*

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Abstract by Richard G. Rose

Arguably the failure of Congress in the 1990s to pass tougher standards led to newsworthy meat and poultry recalls and public health disasters due to contaminated foods. Congress is currently considering the Food Safety Enforcement Enhancement Act of 1997 (FSEEA) which would authorize the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to order recalls, impose civil fines, and shut down non-compliant plants. Simon analyzes how enactment of FSEEA's stricter regulations would affect the food supply in the United States. The Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1907 (FMIA) was the first meat inspection law passed by Congress, and it remains in effect, as amended several times, to this day. Simon contends that the FMIA and related regulations are terribly outdated primarily because the inspection methods do not provide for the detection of microscopic pathogens and harmful microorganisms in meat. Moreover, the powerful meat industry successfully resists stricter regulation of its practices - at the expense of public health and safety.

The FSEEA proposes to provide the strongest enforcement mechanism for improving the quality of the United States' food supply since the inception of the USDA. Among other provisions, the FSEEA requires recalls of adulterated or misbranded food products as well as large civil penalties, which Simon contends will go far to improve the quality of the food supply and prevent future outbreaks. Simon concludes that, though not a cure-all, passage of the FSEEA will significantly improve and protect the safety of our nation's food supply.