

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSJM 8016

As Passed House
April 15, 1993

Brief Description: Requesting investigation and reporting on the E. Coli outbreak.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Agriculture (originally sponsored by Senators M. Rasmussen, Spanel, Haugen, Prince, Loveland, Barr, Erwin, McDonald, Roach, Bauer, Drew, Gaspard, Skratek, McAuliffe, Sheldon, Prentice, Fraser, Rinehart, Deccio, Jesernig, Winsley, Pelz, McCaslin, Sellar, von Reichbauer, Vognild, Moyer, A. Smith, West, Franklin, Wojahn, Hochstatter, Quigley, Anderson, Amondson and Oke).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Agriculture & Rural Development, March 30, 1993, DPA;
Passed House - Amended, April 15, 1993, 98-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Rayburn, Chair; Kremen, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Schoesler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chappell; Foreman; Grant; Karahalios; Lisk; and Roland.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: The process of producing ground meats mixes throughout the product pathogens which would otherwise be confined to the surface of meat. Thorough cooking of ground meat is currently the recommended means of destroying these pathogens. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has adopted a model food code which provides FDA recommended standards to be used by state and local governments in regulating food handling by restaurants and other food service establishments. The model code recommends that ground beef be cooked to a temperature of 140 degrees Fahrenheit throughout. The standard adopted by the state of Washington last year is 155 degrees Fahrenheit. This state also requires cases of human illness associated with E. coli 0157:H7, a potent bacterial pathogen, to be reported to the state.

In testimony presented to the House Agriculture Committee in February 1993, Thomas Schwarz of the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition stated that the center's preliminary reports found that beef patties associated with the deadly outbreak in this state of E. coli 0157:H7 did indeed contain the pathogen. He stated further that the product may not have been cooked sufficiently to eliminate the microbes present in the raw product. He also indicated that the FDA, while investigating the E. coli 0157:H7 outbreak, is providing interim guidance to federal, state, and local officials recommending that ground beef products be cooked to heat all parts of the food to at least 155 degrees Fahrenheit.

By the end of March 1993, the food product or products which were the source of an outbreak of E. coli 0157:H7 related illness in southern Oregon had not been identified. Preliminary results of state and local investigations suggested that the source may have been an ingredient that was common to several food items.

Summary of Bill: Federal agencies, including the Food Safety and Inspection Service, centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Food and Drug Administration, are requested to form a task force to: investigate and monitor outbreaks of E. coli 0157:H7 in the nation; examine the food chain process to determine how improvements may be made to better guarantee the safety of the food supply; examine whether imported meat complies with inspection and health standards comparable to domestic standards; designate E. coli 0157:H7 as a reportable disease throughout the nation; and update the federal Model Food Code to reflect new knowledge and technology.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service of the United States Department of Agriculture is requested to provide a written report to the state Legislature in January 1994 regarding the changes that have been accomplished to address this public health issue.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: (1) Studies show that the spread of E. coli 0157:H7 illnesses in this state dropped off dramatically after intervention by health officials. Early detection for providing early intervention requires reporting. Reporting of E. coli 0157:H7 illnesses is required in this state. The memorial asks the federal government to make such illnesses reportable nationally as well. (2) The federal government needs to examine its cooking standards and the standards that apply to imported meats.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Senator M. Rasmussen (in favor); and Karen Van Dusen, Department of Health (in favor).