Americans Need China-Free Food

by Phyllis Schlafly August 15, 2007

The scandal of imported products from Communist China has accelerated to a level that the public should demand "China-free" labels on anything that goes into a mouth. This includes not only food, vitamins and medicines but toothpaste and toys which, as all parents know, go into children's mouths.

The U.S. recall of nearly a million toys already sold by Fisher-Price, because its paint contains excessive amounts of lead, is only the latest in a string of Chinese product safety scandals. Those toys are Fisher-Price's multi-million-dollar mistake, but the safety of our food and drugs is the responsibility of our government; that's why we have a Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The Communist Chinese government's response was, first, to deny the problem, then, to execute its top food and drug regulator. Sorry, that doesn't assuage our anxiety.

It would take a couple of generations and many billions of dollars to bring Chinese food up to U.S. health and safety standards. Nearly half of China's population lives without sewage treatment, and the water isn't safe, whether from the tap or in sea or pond.

The Chinese food scandal first came to public attention this spring when hundreds of U.S. cats and dogs died. The FDA discovered that our pet food used wheat flour from China contaminated with melamine, a chemical used to make plastics and fertilizers that fooled testers with false high protein readings.

The FDA announced an extensive recall of 100 pet food brands, but nobody asked the question, why is the United States importing wheat products? Can America possibly be short of wheat?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture said that as many as 20 million chickens and thousands of hogs in several states may have been fed contaminated feed.

In May, 900,000 tubes of toothpaste imported from China were withdrawn because tests showed that glycerine had been replaced by diethylene glycol, a chemical used in antifreeze. This poisoned toothpaste has turned up in U.S. hospitals, prisons, and juvenile detention centers.

We import 80 percent of the seafood we eat, and China is our largest foreign source. The FDA says that a quarter of the shrimp coming from China contains antibiotics that are not allowed in U.S. food production and cannot be eliminated by cooking.

The FDA rejected 51 shipments of catfish, eel, shrimp, and tilapia because of contaminants such as salmonella, veterinary drugs, and a cancer-causing chemical called nitrofuran.

China raises most of its fish in water contaminated with raw sewage, and China compensates by using dangerous drugs and chemicals, many of which are banned in the U.S. The Chinese try to control the spread of bacterial infections, disease and parasites by pumping the food with antibiotics and the waters with pesticides.

Chicken pens are often suspended over ponds where seafood is farmed, recycling chicken feces as food for the fish.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture wants to allow China to sell cooked (but not raw) chickens to the U.S. even though public health officials have warned for several years about a potential avian influenza pandemic. Doesn't the U.S. have enough chickens?

China exports more than 80 percent of the world's vitamin C, which is put in thousands of processed foods from fruit drinks to applesauce to granola, and is used as a key food preservative. There is no claim of contamination yet, but many worry about dependence on China, which has driven all U.S. competitors out of business.

Last year, China sold us $675 million in pharmaceutical ingredients and products. It is estimated that 20 percent of finished generic and over-the-counter drugs, and 40 percent of the active ingredients for pills come from China or India.

The United States long ago banned lead in paint because it can cause learning disabilities, kidney failure, anemia and irreversible brain damage in children. But lead is widely used in Chinese manufacturing, and 80 percent of toys sold in the U.S. come from China.

Every one of the 24 kinds of toys recalled for safety reasons in the U.S. so far this year was manufactured in China. Because of lead paint, the U.S. has recalled hundreds of thousands of children's necklaces, bracelets, earrings, charms, rings, toy drums, and 1.5 million Thomas & Friends wooden trains.

Other recalled products include a ghoulish fake eyeball toy filled with kerosene, Easy-Bake Ovens that could trap children's fingers and burn them, and 450,000 tires that lacked an essential safety feature called a gum strip to keep the belts of a tire from separating.

The FDA inspects only one percent of our imports from China. It's not realistic to believe that doubling or tripling the inspection rate would make any significant difference in the safety of foods or toys.

Nor would FDA on-site inspection of producers in China be practical. When FDA investigators visited China in May, they found the factories closed, the machinery dismantled, and all records destroyed.