The Price Of Imported Food Is Too High

by Phyllis Schlafly May 16, 2007

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The vast production of American food is one of the greatest achievements of our free enterprise society and of our superior system of patents that encouraged the invention of fantastically efficient farm machinery. In one of our favorite patriotic songs, we wax lyrical about our “amber waves of grain."

The Clinton Administration conned American farmers into being the principal lobbyists in 2000 for passage of PNTR (Permanent Normal Trade Relations) for Communist China, which gave Chinese goods unconditional access to U.S. markets.

Bill Clinton promised in his State of the Union address that PNTR for China would be a win-win for American agriculture because "this agreement will open China's market to us." His Department of Agriculture predicted that the average annual value of U.S. agricultural exports to China would increase by $1.5 billion.

Globalization turned out to be a cheat. Department of Commerce figures show that U.S. wheat exports to China are less today than before PNTR was passed.

Cheap labor in Asia can produce some agricultural products cheaper than we can with all our expensive equipment, and China's food exports to the U.S. have

become a $2.1 billion industry. We are now importing 13 percent of the food Americans eat.

But we can't count the cost merely in dollars and in bushels. China simply doesn't have health, sanitary or safety standards that Americans expect for our food supply.

So we recently discovered that Communist China has been intentionally mixing an industrial chemical called melamine into pet food and animal feed imported by U.S. companies and sold here under more than 100 brand names. Melamine, which is both a contaminant and byproduct of several pesticides, is used to make plastic kitchenware, glues, countertops, fabrics, fertilizers, and flame retardants.

Because melamine is high in nitrogen, the Chinese have been putting it into wheat gluten and rice protein concentrate in order to trick Americans into thinking they are buying feed with higher protein content. Melamine has no nutritional value.

As this scandal unfolds, we also learn that the Chinese have been putting cyanuric acid, a chemical related to melamine that is used in chlorination during pool cleaning, into wheat gluten products sold to the U.S.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) discovered this deception when our pets started dying. Melamine contamination is implicated in some 4,000 cat and dog deaths, 60 million packages of pet food have been recalled, and our regulators have blocked all Chinese imports of wheat gluten and warned importers to screen every kind of food and feed additive coming from China.

We also learned that 6,000 hogs in eight states may have been fed salvage products containing tainted rice gluten, and several hundred of these hogs may have entered the human food supply. The Department of Agriculture has put a hold on 20 million chickens raised for human consumption that ate melamine-tainted feed.

After a lot of denials and haggling, China announced it is banning the use of melamine and agreed to allow the United States to do some inspection of food processing in China. But inspections in China cannot produce U.S.-style safety because of the sprawling and fragmented food-processing industry in a vast country where poisonings from tainted products are common.

The FDA inspects only 1.3 percent of imported food, but even that small amount reveals plenty that would cause Americans to lose their appetite. Chinese foods detained by the FDA in March alone included frozen catfish tainted with illegal veterinary drugs, fresh ginger polluted with pesticides, melon seeds contaminated with a cancer-causing toxin, and filthy dried dates.

Why didn't the FDA and Department of Agriculture protect us from melamine contamination? They operate on what is called a "risk-based" inspection philosophy, focusing on specific foods where there is the biggest potential risk.

Apparently, melamine wasn't on the "risk" list because no one suspected that the Chinese would deliberately adulterate their food exports with this chemical. The 98.7 percent of Chinese food that we do not inspect enters the U.S. as a matter of trust.

In another scandal, we now discover that the Chinese put diethylene glycol, a prime ingredient used in antifreeze, into many varieties of medicines including cough syrup, fever medication, and injectable drugs. This poison was substituted for glycerin, a sweet-tasting solvent commonly and safely used in drugs, but which is more expensive than diethylene glycol.

Diethylene glycol has killed hundreds of people in Panama, Haiti and other countries. It's next to impossible to track and verify the Chinese manufacturers and numerous middlemen, as the poisoned medicines traveled through various trading companies and countries, with the labels repeatedly altered.

For years, the globalists and free traders have been ignoring and winking at the adverse consequences of our trade with China. Maybe China's poisoning of our pets will be one offense too many to tolerate.