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New food safety law facing funding hurdles

Now that President Obama has signed historic food-safety legislation into law, the coalition of food industry, public interest and consumer groups that supported the new law must convince the new Congress – including the majority Republican House of Representatives pledged to shrink the federal bureaucracy – to fund it.

The law aims to shift the mission of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from reacting to tainted food after an illness occurs to preventing outbreaks in the first place.

Funding the new law would be “money extremely well spent to save money over the long run,” Erik Olson, director of food and consumer safety programs at the Pew Health Group, says, pointing to a

Patrick A. Malone
Patrick Malone & Associates, P.C.
1331 H Street N.W.
Suite 902
Washington, DC 20005

pmalone@patrickmalonelaw.com
www.patrickmalonelaw.com
202-742-1500
202-742-1515 (fax)

recent study that estimated that food-borne illnesses cost the country \$152 billion a year in medical costs, lost productivity and other expenses – not including costs to the food industry when a product is recalled.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the food safety law would cost about \$1.4 billion in its first five years, including the cost of hiring an estimated 2,000 additional food inspectors. Rep. Jack Kingston of Georgia, the ranking Republican on the Appropriations subcommittee that oversees the FDA, says the number of cases of food-borne illnesses in the U.S. does not justify the cost of the new law.

The FDA has yet to say how much of the new law can be implemented without additional funds from Congress, though FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg says that “some of the key elements of this bill need to be adopted no matter what.”

The new law requires manufacturers and farmers to develop strategies to prevent contamination and then continually test to make sure they work. The legislation also gives the FDA the authority to recall food; currently, it must rely on food companies to pull products voluntarily from the shelves. The law also gives the FDA access to internal records at farms and food-production facilities.

Under the law, importers would be required for the first time to verify that products and ingredients from overseas meet U.S. safety standards. Inspections of farms and food-processing operations would be stepped up and the FDA would be required to visit "high-risk" facilities --those where contamination is likely to occur -- once every five years initially and then once every three.

The measure will affect about 80 percent of the food supply that is regulated by the FDA, but does not affect meat, poultry and some egg products, which are overseen by the Department of Agriculture.

Source: [Washington Post](#)

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