



August 14, 2000

Mr. Joseph A. Levitt
Director
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
200 C Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20204

Re: Citizens' Petition for Rules Regarding the Labeling and Manufacture of Foods
Containing Allergenic Substances

Dear Joe:

I am writing in response to the FDA petition regarding food labeling which was filed earlier this year by the Attorneys General of New York, Maryland, Michigan, Wyoming, Ohio, Tennessee, Connecticut, Vermont, and Massachusetts.

As you know, there is no cure for food allergies. Reading ingredient labels and avoiding the food to which one is allergic is the only way to prevent an allergic reaction. FAN applauds reasonable efforts to make label reading clearer, more reliable, and easier for the close to 7 million Americans who have food allergies.

I would like to provide FAN's comments on the Attorney General's recommendations:

- Creating a symbol, a circle with a letter A, to be placed on the front of all packages which contain an allergen. There are several potential problems with using a symbol on the front of a package to identify allergy-causing ingredients; one being that the vast majority of products produced in the U.S. contain one of these ingredients. Food-allergic consumers must have clear, consistent, reliable, and complete information about a product's ingredients on the ingredient declaration. These declarations should have easy-to-understand, simple English terms. For example, milk instead of casein; egg instead of albumin. The circle A designation would not provide allergic consumers with the information that they need to identify the specific type of allergenic food that would be present in the product. Thus, FAN does not believe that the circle A approach will be helpful.

00P-1322

C 531

MEDICAL BOARD

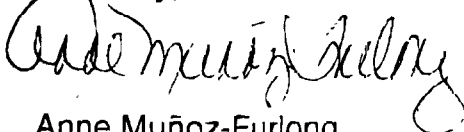
S. Allan Bock, M.D. <i>Boulder CO</i>	Clifton T. Furukawa, M.D. <i>Seattle WA</i>	James P. Rosen, M.D. <i>West Hartford CT</i>	Scott H. Sicherer, M.D. <i>New York NY</i>	Robert A. Wood, M.D. <i>Baltimore MD</i>	Robert S. Zeiger, M.D. <i>San Diego CA</i>
A. Wesley Burks, M.D. <i>Little Rock AR</i>	John M. James, M.D. <i>Little Rock AR</i>	Hugh A. Sampson, M.D. <i>New York NY</i>	Steve Taylor, Ph.D. <i>Little Rock AR</i>	John W. Yunginger, M.D. <i>Little Rock AR</i>	

Mr. Joseph A. Levitt
August 14, 2000
Page Two

- Establishing a toll-free hotline. History has shown that ingredients change frequently. What if a hotline's data is not current? What if the hotline information is different from the ingredient information on the product at the store? Once again, FAN believes the emphasis on labeling improvements should be placed on making sure consumers can trust that what is on the ingredient label is what is inside the product. Consumers should not have to go to a toll-free number to get information and then read the label at the store and hope that they both match. They should be able to read the ingredient label and trust what it says.
- Specifying ingredients found at insignificant levels. FAN has long held the position, and has recommended to the food industry and the FDA in the past, that ingredients and the allergenic sources of ingredients should always be declared on the product's label if present in sufficient amounts to elicit allergic reactions. In such situations, terms such as natural flavors should identify common allergens. This approach would be consistent with a 1996 FDA letter to the food industry regarding labeling of processing aids. FAN has long held this position and has recommended to the food industry and the FDA in the past that even trace amounts of an allergen can cause an allergic reaction. Terms such as natural flavors should identify common allergens in situations where levels in the finished product are sufficient to elicit allergic reactions.
- Establishing food industry guidelines to prevent cross contamination. Judicious use of precautionary labeling statements, e.g. "may contain", can be beneficial in certain situations. FAN endorses FDA's past guidance to the food industry in 1996, which advises that precautionary labeling should not be used to allow diminution of good manufacturing practices. FAN agrees that this area needs stronger guidelines. Many of the large food manufacturers have been working on this issue for a number of years, and have made great progress. Other companies have not yet begun to institute this important practice, relying instead on loopholes in labeling standards instead of best manufacturing practices.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. Please let me know if I can provide additional information.

Sincerely,



Anne Muñoz-Furlong
Founder