

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia
Office of the Chief Clerk
Room 402, City Hall
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 090715)

RESOLUTION

Calling on the U.S. Congress and the Department of Agriculture to Investigate the Practice of Slaughterhouse Operators Prohibiting Ground Beef Manufacturers from Testing for E. coli Contamination Ingredients Supplied by Slaughterhouse Operators.

WHEREAS, Meat companies and grocers have been barred from selling ground beef tainted by E. coli known as O157:H7 since 1994; and

WHEREAS, Tens of thousands of people are nevertheless sickened each year by E. coli contaminated beef burger meat; and

WHEREAS, Ground beef has been blamed for 16 outbreaks in the last three years alone, and this summer, contamination led to the recall of beef from nearly 3,000 grocers in 41 states; and

WHEREAS, Even a single hamburger patty is usually not simply a chunk of meat run through a grinder but instead, consists of various grades of meat from different parts of cows and from different slaughterhouses; and

WHEREAS, While ground meat has a higher incidence of E. coli contamination, the federal government does not require ground meat processors to test their ingredients for the presence of E. coli bacteria; and

WHEREAS, Most meat companies rely on suppliers to check for the bacteria and do not test their own product until after the incoming ingredients are ground together, despite USDA guidance that they test ingredients first as a way of increasing the chance of finding contamination; and

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WHEREAS, Many big slaughterhouses will sell only to hamburger manufacturers that agree not to test shipments for E. coli contamination; and

WHEREAS, Testing only after the raw materials have been ground together, prevents the discovery of where and at what slaughterhouse the E. coli contamination originated; and

WHEREAS, The meat industry treats much of its practices and the ingredients in ground beef as trade secrets; and

WHEREAS, Some ground beef producers that test raw materials before grinding have complained of retribution from slaughterhouse operators with one saying that, “If I test and it’s positive, I put them in a regulatory situation. One, I have to tell the government, and two, the government will trace it back to them. So we don’t do that,”; and

WHEREAS, An Agriculture Department survey of more than 2,000 plants showed that half of the grinders did not test their finished ground beef for E. coli and that only 6 percent tested incoming ingredients at least four times a year; and

WHEREAS, A recent New York Times story chronicled the medical condition of a women (22) who ate a burger tainted with E. coli where within a day, she experienced bloody diarrhea, kidney failure, seizures, coma and eventually, with her nervous system ravaged, permanent paralysis; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Philadelphia City Council calls on the U. S. Congress and the Department of Agriculture to Investigate the Practice of Slaughterhouse Operators Prohibiting Ground Beef Manufacturers from Testing for E. coli Contamination Ingredients Supplied by Slaughterhouse Operators.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the eighth of October, 2009.

Anna C. Verna
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Michael A. Decker
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmembers Blackwell and Jones

Sponsored by: Councilmembers Blackwell, Jones, Greenlee, Rizzo, DiCicco, Goode, Reynolds Brown, Clarke, Kenney, Sanchez, O'Neill, Tasco, Kelly and Council President Verna