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SENATE

P. S. Resolution No. 975

RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by Senator Cynthia A. Villar

RESOLUTION

DIRECTING THE COMMITTEES ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD, HEALTH AND DEMOGRAPHY, AND TRADE, COMMERCE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE REPORTED ENTRY OF UNINSPECTED FROZEN MEAT INTO THE COUNTRY IN RELATION TO THE POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND COORDINATION AMONG GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ON THE IMPORTATION, INSPECTION, DISTRIBUTION AND SALE OF FROZEN MEAT TO ENSURE FOOD SECURITY, SUFFICIENCY AND SAFETY

WHEREAS, it is the declared policy of the State to ensure food security and provide safety and quality standards for consumer products related to agriculture to assure the protection of the public against unreasonable risks of injury and hazards to health;

WHEREAS, an umbrella group of agribusiness operators and farmers, reported that per records of the Bureau of Agriculture Industry (BAI), 116 million kilos of frozen imported pork underwent quarantine inspection for the first six months of 2014 while the data from the Bureau of Customs (BOC) reflected an importation of 121.6 million kilos of pork that entered the country during the same period;

WHEREAS, the same group cited difference in the quarantine vs. customs data on frozen chicken as well, with a discrepancy of 5 million kilos less in the BAI-Quarantine information than in the BOC inspection report;

WHEREAS, there is a possibility that certain cargoes carrying frozen meat failed to undergo inspection upon arrival into the country, which may be expired and/or unfit for human consumption;

WHEREAS, under the Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization Act or Republic Act (R. A.) No. 8435, the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Standards (BAFS), under the Department of Agriculture (DA), was established to provide assistance in establishing the scientific basis for food safety, trade standards and codes of practice and harmonizes them with internationally accepted standards and practices. The BAFS serves as the National Enquiry Point for Codex Alimentarius and other food safety standards. It is in charge of monitoring and disseminating information on international development in food safety;

WHEREAS, R. A. No. 3639 established the BAI and empowered it to prescribe standards for quality in the manufacture, importation, labeling, advertising, distribution and sale of livestock, poultry, meat products, dairy products and animal feeds and veterinary supplies in the country. The BAI is also charged with preventing, controlling, containing and eradicating communicable animal disease by regulating the flow of animals and animal products in the country;

WHEREAS, under R.A. No. 9296, as amended by R. A. 10536, the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) is tasked to promulgate and implement policies and procedures governing post production flow of livestock, meat and meat products both locally produced and imported through the various stages of marketing. The NMIS supervises the operations of abattoirs and meat establishments and conducts ante- and post-mortem inspections of meat. It is mandated to ensure that imported or exportable meat and meat products are produced under acceptable conditions and systems;

WHEREAS, it is the duty of the NMIS to ensure that meat and meat products sold in the country not only passed the food safety standards but must also be correctly labeled and contain the right expiration date;

WHEREAS, the BAI has jurisdiction over the importation of both live animals and meat, the NMIS plays a key role in the enforcement of the regulations over fresh, chilled and frozen meat imports into the Philippines;

WHEREAS, all imported food and agricultural products are required to comply with the Philippines' food safety, health and phytosanitary laws. No product is allowed to enter the Philippines if it is deemed to pose a danger to human life or well-being, either directly or indirectly. All food and agricultural products are required to pass through procedures designed to ensure that they are not contaminated with any pest or any other contaminant and that they are fit for their intended use;

WHEREAS, under Philippine import laws, it is the responsibility of the importer to ensure that any product entering the country's customs territory is in full compliance with Philippine health and phytosanitary regulations. The enforcing authorities will check for compliance by inspecting the goods and relevant import/export documentation and decide on whether the goods may enter the Philippines;

WHEREAS, in September 2005, the DA issued Administrative Order No. 26 (AO 26), which updated its Administrative Order No. 39 (2000) or the "Revised Rules, Regulations and Standards Governing the Importation of Meat and Meat Products into the Philippines." AO 26 reiterates the need for a DA-accredited importer to obtain a Veterinary Quarantine Clearance (VQC) certificate prior to the importation of meat and meat products. A VQC will now be valid for sixty (60) days from the date of issuance, within which the meat or meat products are to be shipped from the country of origin, and may no longer be extended beyond that. A VQC is non-transferable and can only be used by the consignee to whom it was issued. A one shipment/bill-of-lading per VQC issued policy will be strictly adhered to;

WHEREAS, study shows that the quality of a food will not decrease significantly during storage as long as the food is stored properly and used within the recommended time frame. Maintaining food quality depends on several factors, such as - the quality of the raw product; the processing procedures used; the way the food is stored; and the length of storage. The recommended storage time takes these factors into consideration;

WHEREAS, bacteria frequently get into food through careless food handling. Microbes such as Clostridium botulinum, E. coli, Listeria and Salmonella are some of the most feared bacteria and they multiply fast once the frozen meat is thawed;

WHEREAS, frozen meat requires particular temperature, humidity/moisture and ventilation conditions throughout the food chain;

WHEREAS, there is rampant and open sale of frozen meat and poultry products in public markets in the country, which are not stored in freezers or cold storage containers but are left exposed to the natural elements;

WHEREAS, there are reports that the BAI, NMIS and the Bureau of Customs lack coordination in the inspection of shipments which put the general public health in danger;

WHEREAS, considering their mandates under the "Food Safety Act of 2013" or R. A. 10611, the failure of the BAI and NMIS to monitor the entry and sale of expired frozen meat, can compromise and put to risk food safety and security of our consumers once these uninspected cargoes find their way to the public markets;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED, by the Philippine Senate, to direct the Committees on Agriculture and Food, Health and Demography, and Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship to conduct an Inquiry, in Aid of Legislation, on the reported entry of uninspected frozen meat into the country in relation to the policies, procedures and coordination among government agencies on the importation, inspection, distribution and sale of frozen meat, to ensure food security, sufficiency and safety.

Adopted,



CYNTHIA A. VILLAR

Sources:

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<http://whatscookingamerica.net/Information/FreezerChart.htm>

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