

March 25th , 2008

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary
US Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Mr. Leavitt:

I am writing to request your immediate action on an issue of the gravest concern to the government of Honduras.

On March 22, 2005, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an import alert regarding entry of cantaloupe from a single Honduran grower and packer. This was based upon the belief that such product may have been associated with a recent outbreak of Salmonella Litchfield in the United States. Since the announcement, joined by representatives of the Honduran government, the company met on March 24 with the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) staff and provided extensive data regarding its preventative food safety systems.

Unfortunately, this issue has escalated dramatically over the past several days. All Honduran growers and producers of all melons are encountering significant resistance, not just in the United States, but in other markets throughout the world. Most customers are simply refusing to buy any and all Honduran melon products.

This action has precipitated a growing crisis throughout our agricultural sector. We are confronted with potentially devastating losses of jobs and income within a critical sector of our economy, and one which must function within an extremely short growing season.

While we fully respect FDA's food safety efforts, we strongly believe that this calls for an extraordinary cooperative effort between our respective governments. We would therefore propose the immediate formation of an emergency task force



SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO EN LOS DESPACHOS DE AGRICULTURA Y GANADERÍA

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comprised of appropriate experts from both of our governments. Such a group would be charged with:

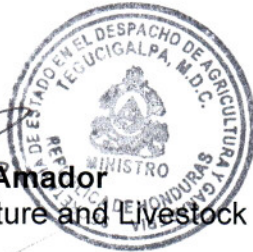
- 1) Conducting a full examination of all data of potential health and food safety concern;
- 2) Conducting an immediate review of Honduran growing and packing facilities to further insure the adequacy of our food safety system;
- 3) The resumption of import activity consistent with such reviews; and
- 4) Appropriate communication to the public.

In order to be effective, the work of the team must begin immediately and it must be completed in a matter of days, not weeks. Given the length of our growing season, the alternative is the collapse of the melon industry.

Time is of the essence regarding this request. Please advise, at your earliest possible convenience, FDA's willingness to work with us to cooperatively address this critical issue.

Sincerely,


Hector Hernandez Amador
Secretary of Agriculture and Livestock



cc: **Ed Schafer**, Secretary, US Department of Agriculture
Andrew C. Eschenbach, M.D., Commissioner, US Food & Drug Administration
Julie Louise Gerberding, M.D., M.P. H., Director, Center for Disease Control
Daniel S. Sullivan, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Economics, Energy and Business Affairs, US Department of State
Daniel Fisk, Sr. Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, National Security Council
Christopher A. Padilla, U.S. Undersecretary of Commerce for International Trade
John K. Veroneau, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative