

## Trading away Canada's food safety\*

As of early October 2008, 20 Canadians have died as a result of an illness (listeriosis) caused by tainted meat. Other Canadians have been sickened by e-coli on iceberg lettuce imported from the USA - seems like we've been hearing all too often about *recalls*.



### What has been happening regarding food inspection in Canada?

The federal government has been cutting food inspection programs and turning over most of the responsibility for inspection to the food producers. The result has been a wave of food-borne illnesses, a terrible example of what happens when public services are reduced.

### What's trade got to do with food safety?

People want to know that their food is safe and healthy. However, deregulation in the food industry fits a broader plan of deregulation and privatization that has been introduced as part of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) – a three year-old NAFTA offshoot program between Canada, the United States and Mexico – that is putting our food at risk.

Part of the SPP agenda involves developing common North American standards on how food is produced, how it is inspected, how it is processed and how it is moved from one place to another. Common food safety standards developed in the public interest might be a good idea. But the SPP is not about raising food standards. It is about removing “trade irritants” and deregulating the food industries.

### Privileged corporate access to the SPP is a danger to our health!

Much of the SPP work is done ‘below the radar screen’ by tri-national working groups made up of government bureaucrats from the three countries. These meetings occur without prior public notice and often produce recommendations that the public is not aware of. A 2006 SPP report that did see the light of day identified stricter pesticide residue limits in Canada as a “barrier to trade.” Canada’s response was to raise allowable pesticide limits on hundreds of fruits and vegetables in an effort to merge its policies with those of the United States.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the SPP initiative is the privileged access granted to it for large corporations under the umbrella of the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC) while civil society is shut out. Given the NACC’s direct line to government decision makers, it is not surprising that the Canadian government is heeding corporate calls to remove “barriers to trade” in North America by “homogenizing” standards – often leading to a lowering of ours.

### What you can do

- Ask the candidates in your riding to make a Commitment to Food Safety. Go to [www.foodsafetyfirst.ca](http://www.foodsafetyfirst.ca) to be able to take immediate action.
- Insist on a return to a full-time oversight role for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure that industry implements food safety controls.
- Ask the candidates where they stand on the corporate-driven SPP, and insist that the SPP be open to full public participation, particularly with regard to adopting the *highest* standards for food safety not only for Canada, but throughout North America.

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\* One of a series of ‘one-pagers’ prepared by Common Frontiers. To see them all go to [www.commonfrontiers.ca](http://www.commonfrontiers.ca)