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Open letter to Canadian food processing industry leaders

I am writing to inform you of a decision the federal government has made that could negatively affect your businesses and to ask for your help to persuade Ottawa to reconsider.

The federal government has quietly announced plans to cancel important food safety initiatives put in place to address the food safety and inspection system failure which claimed the lives of 23 Canadians as a result of the listeriosis outbreak in 2008.

The CFIA's *2011-12 Estimates Report on Plans and Priorities* declares that "resources will sunset for Listeriosis, and for increased frequency of food inspection in meat processing establishments" in 2013-14. For your information, the plan can be found at <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/2011-2012/inst/ica/ica00-eng.asp>.

This means the government is planning to cut the funding it put in place to improve food safety and inspection following the outbreak and, further, to cut the funding it put in place to increase inspection oversight at meat processing plants in Canada.

The document forecasts a smaller CFIA with less funding (\$21.5 million less than current levels) and fewer staff by 2013. The CFIA's Food Safety Program will bear the overwhelming burden of these cuts -- \$21.1 million and 207 fewer food safety staff.

A small increase in food safety funding in the 2011 budget will not make up for these cuts. And, cuts that Ottawa will put in place in its 2012 budget translate to a further reduction of between \$37 million and \$74 million for food safety.

In our opinion, these plans will cripple the food safety and inspection program at CFIA and introduce new doubt among Canadian consumers that processed meat and other food products are as safe as they should be. Further, these cuts will raise red flags

among US safety regulators who require the higher frequency of inspection for Canadian meat products to be eligible for importation to US consumers.

In direct costs, lost value and lasting damage to its reputation, Maple Leaf Foods paid a heavy price for the food safety and inspection system failure which came to light with the listeriosis outbreak in 2008. I know you will agree that anything that undermines public confidence in the safety of food produced in Canada must be taken very seriously and that it is vitally important to protect access to the US market.

Ottawa cannot be allowed to turn its back on its duty to protect consumers from unsafe food.

Please join me and urge Prime Minister Harper to re-consider these cuts and to declare that food safety and inspection budgets will be enhanced, not cut.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Kingston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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