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CONTACT: Liz Richardson, 202-223-9870 x21, lrichardson@tfah.org

Trust for America's Health Testifies before Congress, Director Urges Food Safety Reforms Amid Major Salmonella Outbreak

TFAH Released Food Safety Report in April, Warning of Gaps, Risks

Washington, D.C. – Jeffrey Levi, Executive Director of Trust for America's Health (TFAH), testified before the House Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations today, in the wake of this week's nationwide salmonella outbreak. Approximately 76 million Americans – one in four – are sickened by foodborne disease each year. Of these, an estimated 325,000 are hospitalized and 5,000 die, costing the U.S. \$44 billion annually. Levi urged FDA to provide detailed strategic plans to Congress with corresponding budget increases, so that crises of this nature are contained in a more effective way, or prevented from reaching the kitchens and plates of the American public altogether.

Levi testified before the Subcommittee, “The current outbreak of salmonella associated with tomatoes is a perfect demonstration of our need for a modernized food safety system: It shouldn't have taken over 140 people getting sick from salmonella poisoning for the government to start taking nation-wide action to protect the American people, but it did. Not only has it taken us too long to recognize the threat, we are still struggling to find its source, and we should have had systems in place to prevent it in the first place. A truly successful food safety system is one that we don't read about in the newspapers because it is working so well. But as we have seen over the last week, instead we have a system that places the lives of Americans at risk, undermines overall public confidence in our food supply, and threatens the economic stability of farmers. The current system is reactive, not preventive, meaning we are wasting millions of dollars on responding to such threats rather than building proper controls into the production system.”

Read the full text of Levi's testimony and TFAH's report “Fixing Food Safety: Protecting America's Food Supply from Farm-to-Fork” at <http://healthyamericans.org/>

TFAH's 2008 report identified major gaps in the nation's food safety system, including obsolete laws, misallocation of resources, and inconsistencies among major food safety agencies. TFAH calls for a series of actions to modernize the nation's food safety system by using strategic inspection practices and state-of-the-art surveillance.

Key recommendations include:

- Repeal outdated end-product and processing plant inspection mandates and shift the emphasis of inspection practices to the prevention of outbreaks and illnesses through the entire food production process and supply chain;
- Create mechanisms that allow inspection practices to keep pace with changes in the industry;
- Establish uniform performance standards and best practices that are enforceable through actions including detention and recall authority and civil penalty authority;
- Require food safety education for commercial food handlers;
- Improve monitoring of foreign imports and international practices; and
- Strengthen the FDA with increased funding and aligning resources with high risk threats, with the long-term goal of realigning all federal food safety functions.

Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.
www.healthyamericans.org

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