Good Luck

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln said, with great frustration, of General George B. McClellan, “He has got the slows.” I often think of that quote when I observe the snail’s pace of movement here in Washington. Just consider:

**Food safety.** President Obama signed the Food Safety Modernization Act almost four years ago. The Food and Drug Administration is still writing regulations that will—eventually—protect us from foodborne illnesses.

Because of a court order, the FDA says that it will finalize the regulations in 2015, but the food industry will certainly have a few more years after that to comply. Until then, good luck avoiding food poisoning.

**Antibiotics in animal feed.** Since 1977, the FDA has been trying to stop producers from spurring growth in animals by using antibiotics that are taken by humans. Because about 75 percent of all antibiotics are used on farms, the drug industry has successfully fought off every effort to curb their use.

Now the FDA says that a voluntary approach would be faster than regulations, but that effort appears to be failing, too. Until the FDA forces the issue, good luck sidestepping antibiotics.

**Partially hydrogenated oil.** As I wrote in my July/August memo, the FDA has yet to finalize its proposed ban on partially hydrogenated oil, which contains cholesterol-raising trans fat.

Food manufacturers are kicking up a fuss, and with an anti-regulatory Congress breathing down the FDA’s neck, I’m not holding my breath. Until the FDA bans partially hydrogenated oil, good luck squinting at those hard-to-read ingredient lists.

**Sodium targets.** The FDA has failed to set even voluntary targets for lowering sodium in processed foods, thanks to industry opposition. Until the FDA moves to protect consumers, good luck sidestepping sodium.

**Calories on menus.** Almost five years ago, Congress passed a law requiring chain restaurants to list calories next to every item on their menus and menu boards. (That followed a dozen laws that the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Nutrition Action’s publisher, helped pass in New York City, California, and elsewhere.)

McDonald’s, Panera, and a few others have voluntarily complied with the law, but most have been waiting for the FDA’s final regs.

The holdup? Restaurants want to exempt booze, supermarkets want to exempt their delis, and movie theaters want to exempt their popcorn, soda pop, and candy.

I keep hearing “Soon.” Maybe (perhaps even before you read this). Until then, good luck figuring out what that restaurant food will do to your waistline.

Tens of thousands of lives—Democrats, Republicans, independents, and undecideds—are lost every year because of obsoleste food policies. Yet Washington fiddles.

Why? A Congress that is too often in bed with industry. A Supreme Court that has let the wealthy and powerful determine elections. And regulators that let the food industry put its profits before its customers’ health.

You guessed it: Washington has got the slows.

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Center for Science in the Public Interest

---

Photograph by Stew Milne

MEMO FROM MFJ

Will farms voluntarily stop using human antibiotics in animals? Good luck with that.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is the nonprofit health-advocacy group that publishes Nutrition Action Healthletter. CSPI mounts educational programs and presses for changes in government and corporate policies.