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## Food-Safety Bill Spurs Backlash

By JANE ZHANG

WASHINGTON -- Legislation to overhaul the nation's food-safety system has spurred a backlash from livestock and grain farmers who don't want the Food and Drug Administration inspecting farms.

The legislation, approved by the House Energy and Commerce Committee last month, aims to give the FDA more money and authority to police food safety, and technically doesn't apply to foods the agency doesn't regulate: meat, poultry and some egg products, which are regulated by the Department of Agriculture.

But livestock and grain farmers say the legislation isn't written clearly enough, and they gave lawmakers and regulators an earful Thursday at a House Agriculture Committee hearing.

"Live animals are not 'food' until the point of processing, which is why this bill needs to clarify that the FDA does not have regulatory authority on our farms, ranches and feedlots," said Sam Ives, a veterinarian who spoke for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

The bill appears to have touched off a dispute, as well, between two powerful lawmakers: Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D., Minn.) and Rep. John Dingell (D., Mich.), a main sponsor of the FDA food-safety bill. While Mr. Peterson said that he has been assured by Mr. Dingell that the bill doesn't seek to include livestock and other farms, Mr. Peterson said he will meet again with Mr. Dingell and Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D., Calif.) to press for further clarification. If he's not satisfied, Mr.

Peterson said, he threatened to stop the legislation.

"We are a little skeptical of FDA," Mr. Peterson said outside the hearing room Thursday. "We are very concerned about them getting involved in grain farms, livestock farms."

Dingell spokesman Adam Benson said that "Mr. Dingell has had numerous conversations with Chairmen Waxman and Peterson in an effort to identify and address any concerns Chairman Peterson and the members of the Agriculture Committee may have with the legislation" and that staff members have also met "on a number of occasions." Mr. Benson said Mr. Dingell wants to see passage of the food-safety legislation in coming weeks.

The dispute over legislation to address gaps in the nation's food-safety system shows farmers' apprehension about new regulatory requirements and the FDA. The agency has been under fire for a string of foodborne-illnesses involving products such as spinach, peanut butter and hot peppers.

The USDA, however, hasn't come under as much criticism, even though it has been involved in several recent beef recalls. The agency, which inspects meat and poultry, operates under a different law and is better funded than FDA. Its inspection rules are generally considered more stringent than the FDA's.

At Thursday's hearing, both FDA and USDA officials tried to ease farmers' concerns, saying the legislation



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won't change the their jurisdictions. Mike Taylor, the FDA's new senior adviser on food safety, said the agency already goes to farms as part of its responsibility to oversee the safety of animal feed, vegetables, eggs and other products. The two agencies also cooperated on the investigations of mad-cow disease and others emergencies, he said. If lawmakers exclude grain and livestock farmers from the legislation, they should be careful not to take away current FDA authority.

Mr. Jerold Mande, deputy undersecretary for food safety at the USDA, said both agencies have seen "unprecedented cooperation" through the White House's cabinet-level panel on food safety.

Some farmers — mostly those producing fresh fruits and vegetables, which have been hit with several large-scale outbreaks -- support the legislation.

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