

October 8, 2026

Dr. Donald A. Prater  
Deputy Commissioner  
U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) - Human Foods Program  
5001 Campus Drive  
College Park, MD 20740

Dear Dr. Prater:

We write to express our concern regarding the FDA's response to the recently concluded Cyclospora outbreak linked to Taylor Farms. While we welcome the recent commitment expressed by the Human Foods Program to take measures to mitigate and prevent future outbreaks, this outbreak highlighted critical vulnerabilities in our nation's food safety oversight and raised troubling questions about the FDA's execution of its public health mandate.

Throughout this investigation, the FDA's response has been hindered by notable delays and a lack of transparency, ultimately exposing consumers to unnecessary risk. Although initial evidence pointed to shredded iceberg lettuce from Taylor Farms de Mexico as a source of contamination, FDA investigators took nearly a month to launch environmental sampling and on-site inspections in Mexico. Additionally, the recall classification was delayed for over a month, creating widespread public confusion.

Furthermore, public messaging surrounding the outbreak was inconsistent, leading to financial losses and unnecessary food waste involving U.S.-grown produce. Discrepancies routinely appeared between the illness counts reported by the CDC and the FDA, while the Agency shared minimal details regarding its specific response efforts. In past outbreaks, the FDA regularly disclosed when actions were being taken, including when foreign inspections were initiated and samples were collected.

To restore public trust and ensure accountability, the FDA must address the systemic inefficiencies, communication breakdowns, and regulatory leniency that have hindered this response. We respectfully request that you provide responses to the following questions:

- What factors delayed the FDA's deployment to Mexico to conduct an on-site investigation?
- In a separate outbreak, it was reported that the FDA was unable to access a particular facility due to safety concerns. If the FDA cannot conduct on-site safety inspections at certain foreign food facilities due to security concerns, why are imports from these facilities still permitted to enter the U.S. market?
- Which specific FDA personnel were deployed, and did the team comprise an appropriate balance of inspectors, investigators, and subject matter experts?

- Given FDA's authority to issue Import Alerts, why has an import alert not been issued on iceberg lettuce from Central Mexico when it meets the criteria for one?
- What accounts for the one-month delay in classifying this as a Class I recall?
- How was information communicated and shared between federal agencies and state public health partners during this outbreak investigation?
- Did the consolidated communications functions under the department's shared services approach negatively impact the FDA's ability to communicate to the public about the outbreak?
- What is the estimated staffing allocation within the Human Foods Program dedicated to foodborne illness outbreak response, compliance and enforcement, and after event prevention efforts?

We appreciate your prompt attention to these critical matters and request a detailed response by November 6, 2026.

Sincerely,

Brian Ronholm  
Director, Food Policy