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September 5, 2024

The Honorable Phyllis Fong  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Inspector General  
Jamie Whitten Building, Room 117-W  
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Inspector General Fong,

I write to request an investigation into the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) handling of repeated sanitary violations found at the Boar's Head plant in Jarratt, Virginia. I am deeply concerned about the ongoing, nationwide listeria outbreak linked to recalled Boar's Head deli meat produced at the plant. I am further alarmed by recent reports that the facility responsible for the outbreak had repeatedly violated federal regulations.<sup>1</sup> According to documents released by the USDA, "government inspectors logged 69 instances of 'noncompliance' with federal rules in the past year, including several in recent weeks."<sup>2</sup> These violations are abysmal, including heavy discolored meat buildup, meat overspray on walls, large pieces of meat on the floor, black patches of mold on a ceiling, blood puddled on the floor, and a rancid smell in the [facility's] cooler.<sup>3</sup> Despite these findings, regulators allowed the facility to continue operating, endangering countless lives. The actions taken by the USDA were inadequate and an investigation is necessary to prevent deadly mistakes from reoccurring.

In July 2024, Boar's Head recalled nearly 7 million pounds of deli products, prompting grocery stores across the U.S., including Big Y and Stop & Shop stores in Connecticut, to close deli counters.<sup>4</sup> However, recently released documents reveal that inspectors found multiple sanitary violations at the facility since August 2023.<sup>5</sup> Despite the repeat offenses, USDA failed to

<sup>1</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/boars-head-plant-linked-deadly-outbreak-broke-food-113253021>

<sup>2</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/boars-head-listeria-recall-fcde06b66dca38d53361c92495a7cfd>

<sup>3</sup> [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_file/documents/Non-Compliance\\_Reports-812023-To-822024.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/documents/Non-Compliance_Reports-812023-To-822024.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/big-y-closes-delis-boars-head-meat-recall/3345710/>

<sup>5</sup> [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_file/documents/Non-Compliance\\_Reports-812023-To-822024.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/documents/Non-Compliance_Reports-812023-To-822024.pdf)

take strong enforcement action against the company. Boar's Head officials claim to have taken corrective action upon receiving the violations,<sup>6</sup> but even with a clear pattern of non-compliance, all they got was a slap on the wrist. As a result of delayed action, 57 people have been hospitalized and 9 have tragically lost their lives.<sup>7</sup>

While I am pleased to hear that the facility “will remain closed until the establishment is able to demonstrate it can produce safe product,” the situation should have never been allowed to escalate to this level of severity. This serves as another example highlighting the need for urgent action to reform and improve the oversight of our food supply. That is why I urge you to move swiftly to investigate USDA's actions to prevent this from happening again.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senate

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<sup>6</sup> <https://boarshead.com/products-recall-2024>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/delimeats-7-24.html?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/delimeats-7-24/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/delimeats-7-24.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/delimeats-7-24/index.html)