



October 27, 2010

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2
By courier & email

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

Please keep your government's promise to Canadian families on food labelling regulations

We are a coalition of groups advocating for Canadians with serious food allergies and celiac disease. We are very concerned about the stalled progress on important changes to Canada's food labelling regulations, changes which are eagerly anticipated by millions of Canadian families and could literally save lives. After not receiving adequate assurances from the Minister of Health, we are now seeking a commitment from you that these regulations will receive final approval before the end of the year, as promised by your government in July 2008.

As you are no doubt aware, food allergy is the leading cause of anaphylaxis and a growing public health concern. Recent Canadian research estimates that food allergies affect more than two million people and one in two Canadians know someone with a serious food allergy. An allergic reaction can range from mild – such as a rash or hives – to the most serious – including difficulty breathing and sudden drop in blood pressure. If not treated quickly anaphylaxis can be fatal.

With no known cure for anaphylaxis, avoidance of allergens is the only means of staying safe and preventing a reaction. Accurate and understandable food labelling is therefore the first line of defence for food allergic individuals. People with food allergies and those who shop on their behalf must be able to make informed decisions based on food labels that are accurate, clear, and complete. The current food labelling policy is not stringent enough to ensure such accurate and clear descriptions of food ingredients on pre-packaged foods.

This is why our groups were so pleased to support – and salute – the federal government's announcement on food labelling by (then) Health Minister Tony Clement in July 2008. After a decade of discussion with Health Canada officials, Members of Parliament and Government Ministers, it finally appeared progress was being made when your government introduced new labelling requirements.

As the Minister said the day the proposed changes were announced: "The Government of Canada is taking action to protect the health and wellbeing of Canadians with food allergies and celiac disease... these new proposed labelling requirements will provide Canadians with the information they need to manage their own allergies, and give parents greater assurance about the food they give their children who may have allergies."

Over the following months, many of us participated in consultation meetings with Health Canada. We also facilitated opportunities for members of our community to provide feedback on what is officially called the *Proposed Amendments to Enhance the Labelling of Allergens, Gluten Sources and Added Sulphites*. Overall we were comfortable with the results of this consultation process and looked forward to the amendments being enacted.

It is our understanding that a final draft of the proposed amendments has for some time been waiting for government approval and publication in Canada Gazette Part II, and that there have already been three extensions to the timeline for final approval. It is our further understanding that this approval must be given by the end of this year, or the entire lengthy and costly process for changing Canada's food labelling regulations will begin again.

After more than a decade of discussion and more than two years since your government's announcement, it is now time to act.

Members of the community have been expressing their impatience to our organizations, especially given the lengthy phase-in period (up to 2 years) for food manufacturers to adhere to the changes once they are approved. Any further delays would be unconscionable.

We urge you to consider the continued health and food safety costs that will be incurred if the current food labelling shortfalls are not addressed, including:

- Increased number of emergency department visits following accidental food exposure
- Limited access to safe, nutritious foods for a growing population afflicted by food allergy and celiac disease
- Costly food allergen recalls because it is impossible to hold food manufacturers, importers and distributors to standards that have not been clarified and are not mandatory.

As time is running out on positive changes to food labelling regulations, we urgently seek your assurances that the last version of the proposed amendments will be approved as planned by the end of this year. Millions of Canadian families are counting on your leadership – because these changes could save lives.

We would be pleased to answer any questions your office may have and look forward to receiving a positive response from your government soon. Anaphylaxis Canada can provide contact information for the organizations listed below – 1-866-785-5660.

Respectfully yours,

Dr. Richard Warrington, President
Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical
Immunology

Dr. Eric Leith, President
Canadian Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
Foundation

Laurie Harada, Executive Director
Anaphylaxis Canada

Mary Allen, CEO
Allergy/Asthma Information Association

Diane Dubord, Executive Director
Association québécoise des allergies alimentaires

Jim McCarthy, Executive Director
Canadian Celiac Association

Gwen Smith, Editor
Allergic Living Magazine

Copies: by email

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M.P.
Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building
Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0K9

The Honourable Stockwell Day
President of the Treasury Board of Canada and
Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway
Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
Strategic Communications and Ministerial Affairs
L'Esplanade Laurier, 9th Floor, East Tower
140 O'Connor Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0R5

The Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Industry
C.D. Howe Building
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5

The Honourable Gerry Ritz
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
1341 Baseline Road
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5

Ms. Glenda Yeates
Deputy Minister's Office - Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9