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## Egg Lesson? Buy Local

### Massive Recall Mega-farm hens have sickened hundreds

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The record recall of more than 500 million eggs from mega-farms in Iowa should serve as the equivalent of a five-alarm fire for Congress and federal regulators.

And it should serve as a reminder to Connecticut consumers to buy local.

Consumers in this state have little to fear from the outbreak; it appears that none of the contaminated eggs are being sold here. But the scare has made many people turn to small local farms for eggs from "pasture-raised" hens.

They're finding that local is not only safer, but the eggs taste better.

Nearly 1,500 people have been sickened in other parts of the country by salmonella poisoning possibly linked to contaminated eggs from two giant Iowa producers. It is the largest outbreak ever associated with this type of bacteria.

The health scare exposes a flawed regulatory system. Officials from the Food and Drug Administration recently inspected facilities owned by the two Iowa producers and found disgusting conditions, including barns infested with maggots and rodents, as well as pits below laying houses piled with several feet of chicken manure — an intolerable situation that cries out for swift federal enforcement of basic cleanliness standards.

U.S. Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro, D- New Haven, who heads a congressional committee

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with oversight of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the FDA, is asking both agencies for more information about what steps they took to prevent a salmonella outbreak.

After dawdling for years, Congress finally adopted egg production safety rules that took effect weeks ago, too late to prevent the current outbreak. Congress must now move expeditiously on another measure that would require routine inspections of high-risk food facilities, including chicken houses.

Beyond the question of food safety, the egg recall is a reminder of the inhumane conditions on large factory farms, where as many as 150,000 birds are kept in a single building, with several hens crammed into each tiny cage the size of a file-cabinet drawer, enabling infections to spread quickly.

That knowledge should encourage consumers to buy eggs from local farms that raise hens under more humane conditions. Starting in 2012, the European Union will ban tiny cages for egg-laying hens. The United States would be well to follow that enlightened example.

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