

07-30-09

House schedules 2nd vote Thursday on Food Safety bill

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) opened and closed her July 30th weekly press conference with the same message: that the House will pass vitally important Food Safety legislation, H.R. 2749, today. The legislation which narrowly failed to win a two-thirds majority in a House vote Wednesday is coming up under less restrictive rules Thursday afternoon to allow passage on a straight majority vote. She said that improving food safety in the United States is a key part of the Democrats' overall plan to reform the health care system and improve the health of all Americans.

“As a mother and a grandmother, I’m very excited about the Food Safety bill that will pass the House later this afternoon,” Pelosi said. “So important. So long overdue. And now we will have a President who will sign the bill, and it will have strong bipartisan support.” She concluded that passing the bill “will be part of how we have advanced not only health care, but the good health of the American people.”



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi explaining the importance of passing Food Safety legislation July 30th. Photo: Agri-Pulse.

As pointed out in yesterday's edition of *Agri-Pulse*, the "Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009" would significantly expand the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) role in agriculture. However, facilities already regulated by USDA would be exempt from some of the FDA's extended powers, including most grain and livestock operations.

The Wednesday vote's final tally was 280 for vs. 150 against, while 286 were required for passage under special rules that limited debate and blocked amendments. Following the lead of House Ag Committee Ranking Member Frank Lucas (R-OK), seventeen of the 18 Republicans who serve on the Ag Committee voted "no" with only Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska offering "yea." A small group of Democrats who support organic farming also voted against the bill. Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME), a former organic farmer, said she opposed the bill because it would have imposed too many burdens on small farms.

But 50 of the 177 Republicans serving in the House voted for the bill. Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), ranking member of Energy and Commerce "strongly recommended" that his colleagues support the bill and read a letter from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the National Pork Producers Council and others that expressed their support for the bill. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN) named a long list of farm and grain, livestock, poultry and specialty crop groups who he said either support or no longer oppose the bill. Peterson was able to win concessions in the bill that exempt grain and livestock farms from FDA inspections. For more background on the food safety debate, go to www.Agri-Pulse.com and listen to our Wednesday audio update.

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