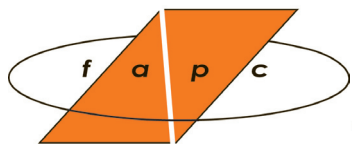


# Food & Agricultural Products Center



## FLASH!!

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY™

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## Food Allergen Labeling Act is Signed into Law

STILLWATER, Okla. – Although the exact number of allergic individuals in the United States is unknown, it is estimated that 1.5 percent of the adult population and 5 percent of children younger than three years old have some form of food allergy.

“Recent studies estimate that 150 Americans die each year due to the ingestion of allergenic foods,” said Nurhan Dunford, oil/oilseed chemist for the Food & Agricultural Products Center. “Allergic reactions can be caused by a variety of foods, and in theory, any food protein is capable of causing allergic reactions.”

President George W. Bush recently signed the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act to go into effect Jan. 1, 2006.

The bill requires food manufacturers to clearly state if a product contains any food allergens responsible for majority of the allergic reactions.

“The act will provide improved food labeling information to the consumers who suffer from food allergies,” Dunford said. “This labeling will be especially helpful to children who must learn to recognize the presence of substances they must avoid.”

For example, if a product contains the milk-derived protein casein, the product’s label would have to use the term “milk” in addition to the term “casein.” If the food formulation contains “albumin,” then the label would have both “egg” and “albumin,” so that those with allergies would clearly understand the presence of an allergen they need to avoid.

The act requires that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration conduct inspections and issue a report within 18 months to ensure that the food manufacturers comply with practices to reduce or eliminate cross-contact of a food with any major food allergens that are not intentional ingredients of the food.

Lester M. Crawford, acting commissioner for the FDA, said the bill also calls for FDA to issue final regulations defining “gluten-free” and permitting the voluntary labeling of products as “gluten-free” no later than 2008.

The Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act requires, in virtually all cases, a complete list of all the ingredients of a food on the food label.

For example, 21 *Code of Federal Regulations* 102.22 requires food source identification for protein hydrolysates, including “hydrolyzed wheat gluten” and “hydrolyzed soy protein.”

A recent review of the FDA food recall actions for undeclared allergens indicates an increase in recalls during the last decade.

As a part of the public health mission to keep food safe, the FDA is increasing its activity on food allergen awareness.

“A major goal of the agency is to provide guidance to industry and regulators on how to manage allergens through appropriate manufacturing and labeling practices,” Dunford said.

The FDA allergen awareness efforts currently focus on foods that are most frequently implicated in serious allergic responses, such as milk, eggs, fish, wheat, tree nuts, crustaceans, mollusks and legumes, specifically peanuts and soybeans.

“These foods are estimated to cause 90 percent of the allergic reactions in the U.S.,” Dunford said. “Some of these foods, such as milk and eggs, are frequently used as food ingredients in formulated products.”

Very small amounts of these proteins may cause allergic reactions, and the response may vary from mild to

life threatening, depending on an individual’s sensitivity.

Other compounds such as FD&C Yellow No.5, sulfites and carmine/cochineal extracts also may cause allergic reactions.

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