

FDA wants to enforce standards for imported food

By Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times

WASHINGTON – The Food and Drug Administration proposed sweeping new rules on Friday that would require food importers like Walmart and Cargill to make sure that their foreign growers and processors were following American food safety standards to prevent contamination in an increasingly globalized food supply.

About 15 percent of food that Americans eat comes from abroad, including nearly two-thirds of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The rules, if made final, would shift the responsibility for ensuring that food is safe from the FDA to companies. American companies would have to prove that their foreign suppliers had controls in place through actions like auditing the foreign facilities, testing food, and reviewing records. American importers would have to keep their own records on foreign suppliers. They would be allowed to hire outside auditors to make on-site inspections.

These are the last major rules needed to implement the Food Safety and Modernization Act, a landmark law passed by Congress in 2010 that was the first significant update of the agency's food safety authority in 70 years. The administration has been criticized for not moving more quickly to carry out the law. The first set of rules, which applied to domestic producers, was proposed in January. The new rules proposed Friday exempt importers of seafood and fruit juices.

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