

## FDA Seeks Comments on Pet Food Certification

**The U.S. Food and Drug Administration hopes to evaluate the use of third-party certification programs for cat and dog food imports.**

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Citing an increasing number of retailers and other food sellers that are expecting their suppliers to be certified in regard to food safety and quality issues, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is seeking comments from the public on the use of third-party certification programs for foods and feeds, including cat and dog foods.

An interagency working group last November released an "Action Plan for Import Safety: A Roadmap for Continual Improvement" ([www.importsafety.gov](http://www.importsafety.gov)). That plan included a recommendation to verify compliance of foreign producers with United States safety and security standards through certification.

Essentially, the FDA wants to identify existing certification programs and understand how it can ensure these programs help ensure safe and secure food products that meet FDA requirements.

According to the government, third-party certification programs of foreign producers would not replace FDA inspections but rather "augment the Federal Government's and the importing community's ability to ensure that products imported into the United States meet U.S. safety and security standards."

The FDA envisions using third-party certification programs to allow it and other agencies to "focus their resources on products from non-certified firms or for which information suggests there may be safety or security concerns."

Among other things, the FDA would like to know what domestic and foreign third-party programs for suppliers are currently in use by U.S. companies and how these programs ensure independence and avoid the conflicts of interest inherent in accepting fees from the very companies seeking certification.

It would also like to know if existing certification programs already ensure compliance with FDA requirements and, if not, how the programs would need to be modified to ensure compliance. Many of the existing programs are designed to meet foreign government requirements, which may or may not meet or exceed U.S. standards.

The government also wants to know what's preventing the majority of U.S. firms from participating in existing certification programs. For example, do U.S. firms know about existing certification programs, are the programs cost effective, and are they accessible to smaller businesses?

In addition, the government would like to know what incentives would move U.S. and foreign companies toward participating in such programs. Possible incentives include expedited treatment at U.S. ports of entry, the creation of a database of available programs and the use of certification as a factor in determining inspection priorities (i.e., certified companies would presumably face fewer government inspections).

The FDA will accept comments via [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) (Docket No. FDA-2008-N-0183) until May 19, 2008.

The agency is also seeking comments on its broader Food Protection Plan (Docket No. FDA-2008-N-0188), which was created to address domestic and imported food safety concerns.