



For Immediate Release
September 10, 2008

Liberals will invest in food safety

WALKERTON, Ontario – A new Liberal government will invest an additional \$50 million to build a more robust food safety net, Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion announced today.

“Canadians have been alarmed by recent revelations about unsafe food making it to our store shelves,” said Mr. Dion. “An important lesson from what happened in Walkerton is that a government cannot cut corners when it comes time to protecting the health and safety of Canadians for the sake of so-called efficiencies.”

To ensure that lunch meats and other foods are safe for all of us, a Liberal government will invest to get government inspectors back on the floors of food processing plants in order to focus more on keeping the food we eat safe rather than paperwork. In addition, a new Liberal government will conduct a food safety review to ensure that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has the right number of inspectors and resources in an ongoing way.

“A Liberal government will make the necessary investments to ensure that the food we all eat is as safe as it can be,” he said.

Mr. Dion was joined by Walkerton Mayor Charlie Bagnato, whose community was devastated by the deadly tainted water tragedy in 2000 that killed seven people and made thousands of Ontarians ill.

Mr. Dion reiterated Mayor Bagnato’s call for a full public inquiry into the current listeriosis outbreak – not the watered-down “investigation” announced by the Prime Minister. As Mayor Bagnato stated on August 29, 2008 “Governments should have learned from the mistakes that led to the tragedy in Walkerton. I am completely shocked that Mr. Harper has opted to make the same mistakes nationally that led to our disaster...Food safety is not just a line item in a budget; it is about keeping our families safe.”

As the final report into the Walkerton tragedy concludes, the government should ensure that adequate resources are provided to ensure that these inspections are thorough and effective.

“By recruiting more inspectors, ensuring inspectors have access to the best technology and expanding inspection efforts of both home-grown and imported foods, Canadians will be able to have greater faith in the food we all eat. More inspection means more safety for all Canadians,” he said.

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BACKGROUND

Additional Food Inspectors

- Recent media and union reports have indicated that food safety inspectors are currently spread too thin and are too often unable to spend the time they should on the plant floor.
- To address this issue, a new Liberal government will support the hiring of an additional 100 inspectors. These additional inspectors will be put to work ensuring our food is safe when it reaches store shelves.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency employed about 1200 inspectors in 2007. The new Liberal investment will result in an eight per cent increase in number of inspectors.
- This investment will represent an almost five per cent increase to the federal investment in food inspection.
- This commitment will ensure that there is a greater, hands-on presence of inspectors to conduct proper safety check to better protect the safety of the food we eat, both domestic and imported.
- By increasing the number of food inspectors, Canadians can have greater confidence in the safety of the food that they and their families eat.
- To ensure the long-term strength of the food safety system, we will conduct a review that will look the resources in the food safety system to ensure the ongoing safety of the food we eat.

Full Public Inquiry

- On Saturday September 6, one day before the start of the election, the Stephen Harper government announced the terms of reference for an “independent investigation.”
- An “independent investigation” is not a full public inquiry. It is not being held under the *Public Inquiries Act* and the findings will not be released publicly – they will be submitted to the Minister of Agriculture.
- Whoever is appointed to run this watered-down investigation will not have the powers that they will need to hold a comprehensive inquiry – like the power to issue subpoenas and compel testimony.
- The terms of reference announced by Harper do not even include an examination of the role of the Conservative government in the lead-up to this crisis.