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Infant Formula Adulteration with Melamine Underscores Need for Better Detection Methods

Quality and Safety of Food Ingredients Addressed at Scientific Workshop

Rockville, Md., June 17, 2009 — Following the recent adulteration of infant formula and other milk products with the industrial chemical melamine, the U. S. Pharmacopeial (USP) Convention is holding an international workshop this week to explore better ways to detect deliberately falsified protein content in food ingredients. The presence of false protein can lead to illness and death, as with thousands of Chinese children in the tragic melamine adulteration of infant formula this year and with pets in the United States in 2007. Vulnerabilities in global supply chains for food and drug ingredients allow such adulteration to affect people worldwide, which is what happened in similar instances where toxic diethylene glycol was substituted for the sweetener glycerin in toothpaste and cough syrup. USP is a scientific nonprofit organization that sets official standards for the identity, quality, purity, and strength of prescription and over-the-counter drugs. USP also sets widely recognized standards for the quality and purity of food ingredients and dietary supplements.

“This Food Protein workshop comes at a timely moment, as Congress considers legislation to better protect the U.S. food supply,” said James Griffiths, Ph.D., USP’s vice president of food, dietary supplement and excipient standards. “Adhering to good manufacturing practices and utilizing third-party verification programs are important components of food safety efforts, but the international array of experts we’ve convened here agrees that testing to good quality standards is equally essential. The financial motivation for faking protein content can, unfortunately, be compelling. Rigorously defined quality standards and test methods can give manufacturers and regulators powerful tools to catch and discourage bad actors—helping to restore a shaken public confidence.”

Some have separated considerations of “quality” from those of “safety.” However, at a time when public health is threatened by recurring incidents of deliberate or inadvertent food contamination, it is less plausible to do so—and consumers see little distinction between the two. Both quality and safety need to be addressed not only in terms of microbial contamination (such as *Salmonella* or *E. coli*), but in terms of the standards for ingredients used to make or fortify foods for human and animal consumption.

USP publishes the *Food Chemicals Codex (FCC)*, a collection of written quality standards that are used worldwide. USP also provides accompanying physical reference standards that food ingredients manufacturers can use to test the identity and quality of their products. As an organization that has been setting quality

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standards for pharmaceuticals for nearly 200 years, USP is well qualified to do so for food ingredients and dietary supplements.

For more information on the Food Protein workshop, go to <http://www.usp.org/meetings/workshops/foodProteinWorkshop2009.html>; full materials from the workshop will be posted by Friday, June 19.

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The United States Pharmacopeial (USP) Convention is a scientific, nonprofit, standards-setting organization that advances public health through public standards and related programs that help ensure the quality, safety, and benefit of medicines and foods. USP's standards are recognized and used worldwide. For more information about USP visit <http://www.usp.org>. **FY0946**