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Dear Chicago Tribune Editor:

On behalf of the American Celiac Disease Alliance (ACDA) and the thousands of Americans now affected by Celiac Disease, thank you for publishing the two-part investigative series on food labeling and food manufacturing oversight entitled "Allergy Threat: A Tribune Investigation" (Nov. 21 and Nov 23, 2008).

Mr. Roe's thorough and well researched article exposes the serious and sometimes life-threatening problems that can be caused by mislabeled food products. His article paints a compelling and very personal portrait of the challenges people with Celiac Disease, food allergies and other health concerns face each and every time they shop the grocery store aisles.

Celiac Disease is the world's most common autoimmune disease. Although most have yet to be diagnosed, it is estimated that at least 1% of the U.S. population has this inherited disease. Today, the only known treatment is strict adherence to a gluten-free diet for life.

On behalf of those living with Celiac Disease, the ACDA applauds the Chicago Tribune's efforts to raise awareness of the issue and to demand stricter oversight of food labeling and enforcement by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA) was an important first step in protecting celiac, gluten intolerant and food-allergic consumers. Mr. Roe's article clearly indicates that more stringent oversight is necessary. We agree.

In January 2007, the FDA proposed a standard for 'gluten-free' labeling. Under its proposal the maximum threshold level for gluten would be set at 20 parts per million (ppm). When finalized these regulations will help to ensure that individuals with Celiac Disease are not misled by incorrect food labels and that they have truthful, accurate and easily accessible information on processed food labels.

Until this regulation goes into effect and FDA oversight is strengthened, food-sensitive consumers will be left wondering what products they and their families can safely consume. In the case of those with celiac disease, they will also be questioning the safety of adhering to the gluten-free diet, their only medical treatment.

Andrea Levario
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