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Nanos Poll: Canadians Call on Federal Government to Reverse Course on Failed Approach to Food Safety

Posted 29 September 2008 @ 09:30 am EST

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OTTAWA, ONTARIO -- (Marketwire) -- 09/29/08 -- According to a survey conducted by Nanos Research, commissioned by the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, an overwhelming majority of Canadians are opposed to the Conservative government's plans to cut key food safety programs and to expand industry self-policing.

The Nanos Research survey revealed that more than eight of every ten Canadians want the Prime Minister to reverse his decision to cut food safety program budgets. Fifty-six percent of Canadians want the government to cancel the cuts and invest more in food safety and inspection, while another 27% want the cuts cancelled.

"Listeriosis, tainted milk and Gerry Ritz have put food safety on the electoral agenda," says Michele Demers, President of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. "The message from Canadians is clear. They reject the discredited laissez-faire approach to food safety."

Opposition to government cuts to food safety programs extend beyond partisan lines. More than 80% of Conservative voters want to see this government's cuts cancelled and 71% support a more hands-on role for government in policing food safety.

The views of Canadians are in sharp contrast to the current government's plans for food inspection. Official cabinet documents reveal that the Conservative government has approved a range of cuts to key food safety programs at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Planned cuts include shifting from full-time meat inspection to an oversight role, ending inspection of provincial slaughterhouses, and eliminating incentives to producers to ensure full reporting of BSE (mad cow disease) cases.

Canadians also strongly disagree with plans to "allow industry to implement food safety control programs and to manage key risks." While 22% of Canadians accept an increase in reliance on industry self-policing, 73% would like to see their government invest more resources and play a more hands-on role.

"Consumers are now well aware that allowing industry to police itself puts their health at risk," says Anu Bose of the consumer advocacy organization, Option consommateurs. "They will be looking for clear commitments from politicians of all parties that they will end this high-risk practice."

The survey also reveals a high level of trust in government inspectors and scientists to ensure the safety of food (64%) and much less confidence in food industry employees (25%).

"Canadians trust government professionals to safeguard the food they eat, not the food industry," said Michele Demers, President of the Professional Institute.

These results were obtained through a random telephone survey conducted by Nanos Research with 1,200 Canadians from September 20 to September 22, 2008. The margin of accuracy for this sample is 2.8%, 19 times out of 20.

The Professional Institute is urging all federal election candidates to make a four point commitment to food safety. Voters can visit www.foodsafetyfirst.ca to ask their candidates to make this commitment.

The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada represents 55,000 professionals and scientists of whom 1,800 work at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

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