

January 16, 2007

Meatpacking Safety (1 Letter)

To the Editor:

Re “100 Years Later, the Food Industry Is Still ‘The Jungle,’ ” by Adam Cohen (Editorial Observer, Jan. 2): Yes, 100 years ago Upton Sinclair wrote a book about the plight of the immigrant and focused in part on the meat industry. But 100 years later, our industry has been transformed and our meat supply is among the safest, most abundant and certainly the most affordable anywhere in the world.

Today, Department of Agriculture inspectors are present in meatpacking plants continuously and are empowered to prevent any product that does not meet federal standards from entering commerce.

This inspection oversight, which is more intense than in any other industry, has not been reduced.

Today’s meat plants operate in carefully controlled, high-tech environments that approach operating-room levels of sanitation. Bacteria levels on fresh meat products are at the lowest levels in history, according to U.S.D.A. data.

Since 1999, the incidence of E. coli O157:H7 in ground beef samples tested by the Agriculture Department has declined by 80 percent to a fraction of a percent, a level once thought impossible.

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Washington, Jan. 5, 2007