



House Energy & Commerce Committee  
Subcommittee on Health

Healthier America: Legislative Proposals on the Regulation and Oversight of Food

Testimony of Joseph Colalillo  
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Chairman Griffith, Ranking Member DeGette, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Joe Colalillo, President of ShopRite of Hunterdon County, Inc. I have worked in the food industry since I was in grade school, starting full-time after graduating from Villanova in 1983. I have been President of our Company since 1993 when my father passed away. Taking care of our associates, our customers and community is job one.

Our business is family-owned and operated, now in its third generation. We opened our first ShopRite store in South River, New Jersey, in 1954, and for more than 70 years, our stores have been part of the communities we serve. Today, across our five locations, we focus on providing high-quality products and personalized service while staying deeply committed to giving back to the same communities that support our family business. ShopRite of Hunterdon County employs more than 1,300 associates across our stores in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Over the course of my career, I have developed a passion for the importance of food safety. I began our Wakefern Cooperative's Quality Assurance Committee in the late 1990's, building upon a system that was already in place to ensure we were always improving. Currently, we use a 3<sup>rd</sup> party provider to inspect our stores quarterly, have monthly self-assessments, and daily protocols in place. We partner closely with FDA, state officials and our manufacturing partners. I have been on the Board of Directors of FMI – the Food Industry Association since the late 1990's and have had the privilege to chair the industry's Board-level Food Safety Committee as well. Our industry takes

food safety very seriously, and we help each other be the best we can be, realizing that food safety is not a competitive advantage but has to be an industry standard.

I share this background to explain why my message to you today is straightforward: **we need one clear, science-based national standard for food labeling, disclosure and safety – led by the FDA.**

While we have strong state and local government partnerships with each of the nine states where we operate, a patchwork system of regulations across the country is not viable and is not in the best interests of our customers.

### **Wakefern**

At ShopRite of Hunterdon County, we operate under the ShopRite banner through our membership in Wakefern Food Corp., a cooperative established in 1946 with the important mission **to help independent, family-owned grocers compete and succeed in a competitive retail environment.** We currently operate in 9 states - CT, DE, MA, MD, NH, NJ, NY, RI, and PA. The family owners of Wakefern have the good fortune of being represented by 10 Members of the Energy and Commerce Committee, including Frank Pallone, Tom Kean, Paul Tonko, Yvette Clarke, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Jake Auchincloss, Rob Menendez, John Joyce, Nick Langworthy, and Lori Trahan. I served as chairman of Wakefern from 2005 to 2023 and have served as a member of its Board of Directors since 1989.

Through this cooperative model, we improve our purchasing power, logistics, and distribution infrastructure, allowing us to manage costs, maintain efficient supply chains, and keep food affordable for our customers, all while supporting our local farmers and food producers who bring innovation and diversity to the food supply.

Wakefern offers more than 4,000 private-brand products that provide customers with dependable quality at affordable prices, helping families save on their grocery bills.

A state-by-state patchwork of labeling requirements would fundamentally undermine that value. Instead of managing a single, efficient inventory, Wakefern would be forced to stock as many as 36,000 state-specific variations of the same products. To put that into perspective, redesigning a single product to meet differing state requirements can cost approximately \$2,500 per item from a quality assurance and packaging standpoint alone. Applied across thousands of products and multiple states, those costs quickly scale into the tens of millions of dollars before accounting for additional impacts to manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution.

## **Impact of Patchwork Extends to Retail, Manufacturing, Distribution and E-Commerce**

Maintaining and segregating inventory on such a scale is not operationally viable and would significantly increase costs. Those added costs would ultimately be borne by consumers, making it far more difficult—if not impossible—to continue offering private-brand products at prices our customers rely on. Not only will costs rise, but it will also limit consumer choice and slow innovation.

The impact of a patchwork regulatory framework extends well beyond retail operations—it begins at the manufacturing level and carries through storage and distribution. Manufacturers would be required to produce multiple versions of the same product to meet varying state requirements, disrupting production efficiency, increasing costs, and creating unnecessary complexity in quality control. This fragmentation would also affect storage, where facilities would be required to segregate and track state-specific inventory, increasing the risk of errors, spoilage, and waste—particularly for perishable or temperature-sensitive products.

At the distribution level, our highly coordinated logistics networks are designed for speed, scale, and flexibility. Introducing state-by-state variations would constrain that system, requiring additional handling, routing, and compliance checks that slow the movement of goods and reduce overall efficiency. These challenges ultimately ripple through the supply chain—raising costs, increasing the likelihood of product misallocation or recalls, and weakening our ability to respond quickly to shifts in demand or emergencies.

These challenges are further amplified in the rapidly growing e-commerce grocery sector. Online ordering and fulfillment systems rely on centralized inventory management and the ability to efficiently source products across regions. A fragmented regulatory framework would complicate product availability, increase fulfillment errors, and limit the ability to offer consistent assortments to customers across state lines — undermining one of the fastest-growing channels through which consumers access food today.

A single, uniform national standard is essential to preserving the integrity and efficiency of the entire food system—from production to the consumer's table.

## **Protecting Food Affordability Through a Strong Supply Chain**

We recognize that energy and grocery costs are among the most immediate and tangible pressures on household budgets today. That is why our industry focuses relentlessly to keep prices as low as possible—relying on scale, operational efficiency, and a highly coordinated national distribution network to move products seamlessly from manufacturers to store shelves.

This system functions effectively only when it is supported by clear, uniform rules. Even modest disruptions or inefficiencies can have outsized impacts in an industry with margins of less than 2%. Preserving a strong, streamlined supply chain is essential to protecting food affordability for the millions of customers who depend on it every day.

To put a finer point on this, our food system is designed to move products efficiently across state lines to meet demand wherever it arises. In times of disruption — such as natural disasters — grocers regularly shift inventory across regions to ensure affected communities have access to food. A patchwork of differing state requirements could restrict our ability to move products quickly, potentially preventing us from sending certain items into impacted areas or creating uncertainty about compliance in emergency situations.

These challenges are real, not hypothetical. When labeling rules differ by state, the risk of products being shipped to the wrong locations increases, triggering product recalls. The result is food waste that could have been avoided. This fragmentation drives up costs, adds compliance burdens, and reduces efficiency across the supply chain. A single, science-based national standard is essential to ensuring food moves safely, efficiently, and affordably to customers everywhere.

Two recent economic impact studies reaffirm the negative effect on affordability of a patchwork system. Policy Navigation Group outlines a 12% cost increase in impacted states - [COSTS-OF-RECENT-STATE-NUTRITION-LAWS.pdf](#) - and Job Creators Network/Carnegie Mellon University finds that a patchwork system is 26 times more expensive than a uniform system - [JCN-Food-Regulations-Report.pdf](#).

## **Ensuring a Strong, Science-Based Federal Framework**

Given the scale and complexity of today's food system, a strong, centralized federal role led by the FDA is essential. A single, science-based national framework provides clear and consistent expectations for industry, reinforces consumer trust in food safety and

labeling, and allows emerging issues to be evaluated through a transparent, evidence-driven process.

A clear federal standard also prevents the confusion and inefficiency that arise when requirements vary from state to state. In an interconnected supply chain, fragmented rules increase costs and complicate operations in ways that ultimately affect consumers. Empowering the FDA to establish and enforce uniform standards ensures predictability across the food system, protects public health, and supports continued innovation while helping keep food affordable nationwide.

### **Supporting Consumer Health Goals**

We are also increasingly focused on supporting consumers in their individual health journeys.

We have found that everyone's health journey looks different — from managing allergies or chronic conditions to honoring cultural preferences or following a specific diet. Grocery stores are uniquely positioned to support those needs every day. As research from FMI – The Food Industry Association shows, stores are often the most accessible and trusted place consumers turn for health and well-being.

Beyond offering nutritious, affordable food, many stores provide helpful resources like registered dietitians, pharmacy services, and personalized nutrition programs. With a wide range of options and clear information, grocery retailers help shoppers make choices that work for their lives. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to health, but by combining access, affordability, and guidance, grocery stores can help make healthier choices easier over time.

### **Conclusion**

Grocers like us are on the front lines, working to keep food safe, affordable, and accessible for the families we serve. That responsibility depends on a strong, science-based federal framework, an efficient national supply chain, and the ability to meet consumers where they are in their health journeys.

Policies that support consistency, clarity, and science-based decision-making and do not drive up prices are essential to maintaining both consumer confidence and affordability. We applaud you for hosting this hearing and your work to prevent a patchwork system, and we stand ready to work with this Committee and Congress, the FDA, and other stakeholders to ensure the food system continues to deliver for American families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I look forward to your questions.