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WINTER/SPRING 2007

FoodSafe™

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service

The FSIS Magazine

A Call to Action

**Reaching At-Risk Audiences
To Help Fight Foodborne Illness**

AT-RISK



Celebrating the Partnership for Food Safety
Education's 10th Anniversary

1ST NATIONAL BAC FIGHTERS! PROGRAM AWARDS

To recognize outstanding local food safety education
programming based on the Fight BAC!® campaign's
four core safe food-handling practices:

CLEAN ✦ **SEPARATE** ✦ **COOK** ✦ **CHILL**

One outstanding program will be recognized
in each of three categories:

- **General Consumer Outreach**
- **Hospital/Clinic/Healthcare Setting**
- **Developed by Retailer/Restaurant/
Food Service for Customers**

For more information and an entry form, go
to www.fightbac.org and click on
the "education and outreach" tab.

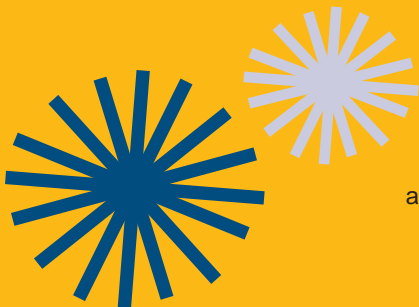


AWARDS

- ✓ A trip for two members of the winning team to Washington, D.C., for the Partnership's Fight BAC!® Capitol Hill celebration in September 2007
- ✓ Featuring of the program on www.fightbac.org and in a newsletter distributed to BAC Fighters! and Partnership supporters nationwide, and
- ✓ \$150 worth of Fight BAC!® consumer education materials.

GENERAL CRITERIA

- ✓ Entries will be accepted until June 1, 2007.
- ✓ Not-for-profit, private sector, academic and government organizations are eligible.
- ✓ Programs must have originated in a sound proposal/workplan with goals for intended audience and intended outcomes.
- ✓ Programs were planned and executed between 2001 and 2006.
- ✓ Programs utilized elements of the national Fight BAC!® campaign.



The Partnership for Food Safety Education unites industry associations, professional societies in food science, nutrition and health, consumer groups and from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration, to educate the public about safe food handling and preparation.

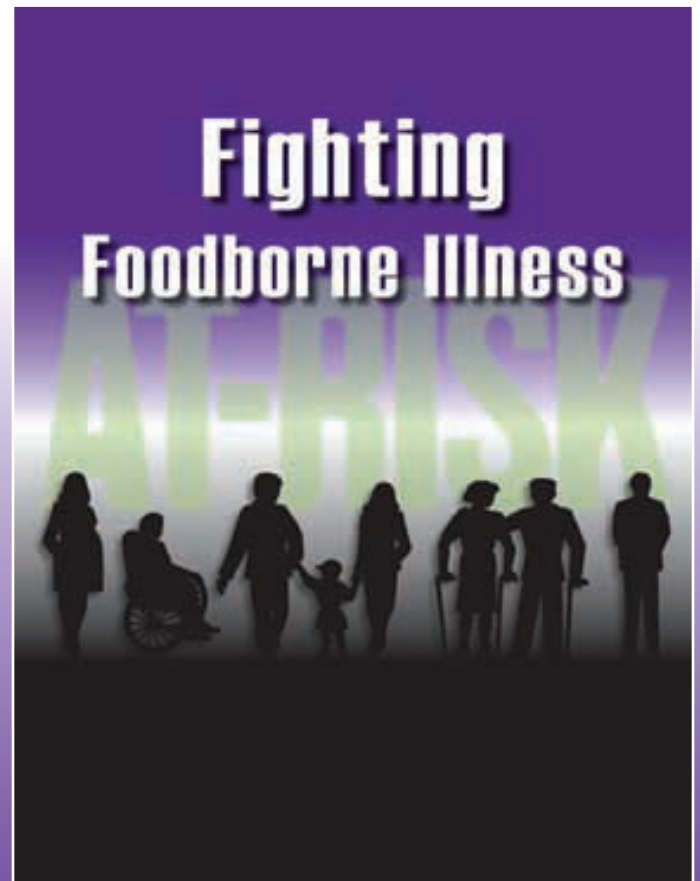
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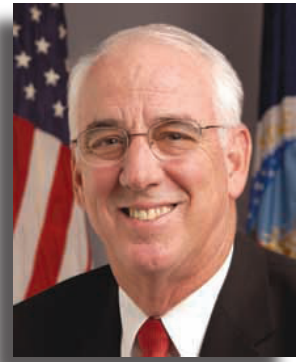


USDA Enlists Public Health, Medical Communities

Foodborne illness, a preventable and underreported disease, is a public health and economic challenge, affecting both general and at-risk populations. Nearly one in five Americans fall into this category and it includes young children, older adults, pregnant women and those with a weakened immune system — people with diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS and transplant recipients.

Cover story begins on page 8.

under secretary USDA



Protecting Public Health With Risk-Based Inspection

Protecting public health is not only more than a nine-to-five job, it's also about constantly re-evaluating and improving our systems to ensure the lowest probable risks to the public. The Office of Food Safety and FSIS are moving forward to update our inspection system to assure the public that the meat, poultry and egg products they buy — in a store or restaurant — have the lowest risk possible from deadly bacteria or other contaminants.

We use a risk-based approach, taking action on the highest risk procedures or products that are more likely to jeopardize public health. We need to enhance our system to give ourselves the ability to anticipate and quickly respond to food safety challenges before they negatively affect consumers. We don't want to wait for something to happen. We need to work proactively. With continued input from our employees and consumer and industry partners, we are making this system even more robust. Let me provide an illustration of where we are heading.

Our inspector must visit three food processing plants in one day. First, the inspector stops at Plant A, which produces ground poultry products. By their nature, these products have a higher risk than other products for carrying harmful bacteria. This is especially true if the establishment has a poor record on cleanliness. Plant A has been warned that it will lose its grant of inspection unless it shapes up.

Next, our inspector goes to Plant B, which also produces ground poultry. However, this plant is practically spic-and-

span. From top management to line employees, it's evident that everyone is dedicated to safety. We have had relatively few issues with this plant over the years.

Finally, our inspector visits Plant C, which has an equally clean record as Plant B. Not only that, it produces a much lower-risk product than ground poultry — cooked, canned hams.

Our current system is set up where our inspector spends roughly an equal amount of time at each plant, every day, regardless of the level of risk each one presents to public health. It makes better sense for our inspector to spend more time in the highest risk plant with the highest risk product, as determined by science-based data and public input.

Of course we're still going to inspect each plant daily, but within any given day, some plants will need a closer, longer look than others. We're working to make that happen.

Our efforts are not about decreasing the size of our inspection force and are not about saving money — neither happens under this plan. It *is* about improving the safety of the meat and poultry products we have responsibility for. It's about spending the time we do have in a smarter way — more time in plants that need us the most. Ultimately, it's about lowering the risk to public health.

RICHARD A. RAYMOND, M.D.
Under Secretary
Office of Food Safety

U.S. Department of Agriculture

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ACTING

administrator
FSIS

FSIS: Where Food Safety and Public Health Meet

(David Goldman, M.D., M.P.H., was appointed Acting Administrator for the Food Safety and Inspection Service on January 19, 2007. Dr. Goldman is also a Captain in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service.)

As a practicing physician, I see many patients who suffer from debilitating illnesses. I have seen it in the United States and the tsunami-ravaged areas of Indonesia. The causes of disease are varied and complex. However, many diseases can be prevented, and these are my focus. As a public health agency, FSIS' aim is to prevent illness, injury or death that might be caused by food, one of life's essentials.

In the United States, safe food is often taken for granted, but we know it is only through the collaborative efforts of all of our public health stakeholders that we are able to keep our food supply the safest in the world. Safe food is essential, and FSIS is uniquely suited to ensure this by employing both a strong inspection component, as well as an equally strong public health orientation.

Five years ago when I came to FSIS, it was an eye-opening experience for me to see how thousands of inspection personnel throughout this country could make a difference in the lives of so many by ensuring that safe product is produced from every federally regulated plant every day.

I also became very well acquainted with the agency's specific public health and scientific activities when I directed the Office of Public Health Science. Here we identified solid, scientific data from outside our agency showing an overall sustained decline in foodborne illnesses from all food sources, especially meat and poultry products. We continue to routinely work with our public health partners sifting through data, which are really clues, to find the cause of any outbreaks of illnesses stemming from food and then use lessons learned to prevent further illnesses.

It's my goal to continue leading FSIS' evolution into a public health regulatory agency. I want to ensure we account for unseen hazards and prevent them from adversely affecting the foods we regulate. I also want to continue to strengthen FSIS' inspection component by continually using what we learn to adjust our training. Furthermore, I want to see our inspection and outreach efforts targeted to where risks to the public are highest. Finally, I want to improve our data collection and analysis system so we can make the most effective decisions to protect consumers.

Our mission is much like the regular check-ups you receive from your doctor, only much more frequent. Any abnormalities your doctor identifies should be dealt with immediately so you can lead a healthier life. Through daily inspections and identification of high-risk areas, we're doing much the same, so you won't get sick from one of life's basic essentials. That's public health — the FSIS way.

David P. Goldman
DAVID GOLDMAN, M.D., M.P.H.
FSIS Acting Administrator

around the Agency

By Matthew D. Baun

Achieving Our Public Health Mission

In nearly every speech given by the USDA's Under Secretary for Food Safety and the Food Safety and Inspection Service's Administrator, you will hear that the mission of FSIS is to protect public health through food safety and security. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that each of the agency's 10,000-plus employees play a role in this effort. Here are three examples of how they do just that.

Under the Cover of Darkness

March 2006—Even by a farmer's watch, these were odd hours — definitely not working hours. Most farms in rural communities cease activity around dusk and are most certainly quiet between eleven at night and three in the morning. But on one farm in Pennsylvania, the shop inside the barn was just getting its day's business underway.

Outside, two FSIS investigators had been keeping watch for several consecutive nights from their vehicle, following up on a tip. It was late at night, but as any investigator from the Compliance Investigations Division (CID) in FSIS' Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement and Review knows, these hours just go with the territory. Their job, like those of all FSIS employees, is to protect public health through food safety and security.

"CID investigators follow up on all tips and complaints they receive about FSIS-regulated product," said **Joseph Priore**, a supervisory CID Investigator in Philadelphia. "The bottom line is that our investigators are driven to protect public health and they go to great lengths to remove harmful and potentially harmful products from commerce in order to protect consumers."

CID investigators receive many complaints about violations of federal food safety laws and regulations. Many of these tips do not pan out, but this one did. The two FSIS investigators watching the barn witnessed the same routine for several nights. They watched a truck arrive at the premises, unload its contents — pig carcasses in this case — and then drive away.

Meanwhile, inside the barn, next to the tractor, cans of oil and bales of hay, the carcasses were being processed into pork products destined for the ethnic markets in Philadelphia and New York City.

These products, intended for human consumption, were being processed without USDA inspection in unsanitary conditions. Each of these factors is a violation of federal law.

Working with USDA's Office of Inspector General, the FSIS investigators gained enough evidence and established clear patterns of the violators' behavior. They then donned bullet-proof vests and prepared to move into the building. While investigators



themselves do not carry firearms, they are accompanied by Federal law enforcement officers who do.

When the USDA team made its move, the man in the barn looked surprised. "Wow, you guys are working late!" he said.

"No, sir," said one compliance investigator. "You are working late. We are just doing our jobs."

USDA made the "bust" without incident, the violator was forced to shut down his illegal operation, and FSIS kept the unsafe products out of the food supply.

FSIS/OPEER CID Philadelphia Investigators from left to right are Joseph Schein, Michael Ronczka, Roslyn Brogdon, Michael Altimari, Paul Flanagan, Scott Warren, and Joseph Priore. (FSIS photo by Lauren Behar)



the end, only one consumer reported minor gastric problems.

“CCMS led to the timely identification of adulterated product,” said **Kis Robertson**, D.V.M., an epidemiologist with HHSD. “Through joint efforts of OPHS and FSIS’ Office of Field Operations, the hazardous product was removed from commerce and more illnesses were likely averted.”

HHSD casts its public health nets far and wide, according to Division Director **Elisabeth Hagen**, M.D. The staff is constantly and proactively engaged in human illness investigations that might be linked to products that FSIS regulates.

“Our team works with state and local public health officials throughout the country,” said Hagen. “We routinely talk to state and local partners to see if there are human illness cases that might be linked to FSIS-regulated products. And, HHSD staff members identify possible links to human illness through surveillance of FSIS routine sampling data and public health list serves.”

Communication also plays a role in these situations. FSIS’ Office of Public Affairs, Education and Outreach issues news releases to alert the media and consumers about the product. FSIS also intensifies its communication with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention when there is a link between human illness and an FSIS-regulated product. “The goal for FSIS and our public health partners is to put the puzzle pieces together to solve the mystery of how persons became ill,”

Putting the Pieces Together

February 2005—Three different complaints, three separate days.

“THE MEAT AND THE PACKAGING SMELLED LIKE GASOLINE.”

“TURKEY WITH UNUSUAL SMELL — LIKE FUEL.”

“GROUND BEEF SMELLED STRONGLY OF DIESEL FUEL.”

FSIS documented these entries in a computer-based surveillance system that tracks consumer complaints — the Consumer Complaint Monitoring System (CCMS). Epidemiologists in the Human Health Sciences Division (HHSD) of FSIS’ Office of Public Health Science (OPHS) constantly monitor the entries.

The tainted product was traced back to a turkey plant whose equipment leaked hydraulic fluid. In

Continued on page 6 ...

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said **Kristin Holt**, D.V.M., M.P.H., FSIS' liaison to the CDC in Atlanta. "This is critical to ensure that we can take immediate and appropriate actions to protect public health."

A Direct Line of Communication

November 2003—A man contacted the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at FSIS because he wanted to prepare a full Thanksgiving dinner for his wife who had terminal cancer and was confined to a hospital bed. He did not know how to cook, so he called the Hotline. **CiCi Williamson**, a food safety specialist on the Hotline, walked him through the steps to safely cook the holiday meal.

More than 2 million calls have come to the Hotline since its inception in 1985. In any given month, the Hotline receives 4,500 to 7,500 calls from the public, according to Hotline Manager Diane Van. During the Hotline's busiest season, around the Thanksgiving holiday, calls increase to about 1,000 per day.

The call Williamson took is just one example of how the Hotline's food safety experts help individual

consumers prevent foodborne illness. During this kind of one-on-one interaction, consumers receive information that empowers them to keep themselves and their families safe. It is impossible to put numbers on prevention but through their work and dedication, the Hotline staff has saved countless citizens from bouts of foodborne illness.

Williamson also informed the man that, because of his wife's condition, she was at a higher risk for foodborne illness and that he needed to be especially careful when preparing meals for her. The hospital granted his wife leave for one day so she could join him in their home for Thanksgiving.


The man later wrote the Hotline about how much he appreciated their help. "His wife had since died of cancer, but he wrote that he had that wonderful Thanksgiving dinner with her at home to remember," said Williamson.

To expand the Hotline's service to individual consumers and provide service to the increasing numbers of consumers using the Internet, the Hotline added a Web-based automated response system called "Ask Karen" to its resources. This feature is accessible on the agency's Web site at AskKaren.gov. Users



USDA Hotline food safety experts, like CiCi Williamson, answer questions that empower callers to keep themselves and their families safe from foodborne illness. (FSIS photo by Matthew Baun)

simply follow the easy-to-use prompts to ask their questions.

"Providing answers to consumers' specific questions through Ask Karen and through the personalized service of the Hotline's food safety experts, FSIS helps consumers protect their health in very specific ways, around the clock," said Van. 

Got Food Safety Questions?



Visit "**Ask Karen**" at AskKaren.gov to Ask a Food Safety Question.

Call the **USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline: 1-888-MPHOTLINE**
(1-888-674-6854)



letters to the Editor

DEAR EDITOR: As Chairman of the Partnership for Food Safety Education I salute USDA on this great new magazine, *be FoodSafe*. We have learned over the years that working together to educate consumers across government, industry and non-profit sectors with a clear and consistent message is the best possible way to have an impact on reducing foodborne illness. The magazine will be an important forum for supporting the public/private approach to food safety education and program development. We look forward to great success for the magazine.

Tim Hammonds
President and CEO, Food Marketing Institute
Chairman, Partnership for Food Safety Education

DEAR EDITOR: The Food Safety and Inspection Service of the USDA is the authority on food safety in this country. I am thrilled to see *be FoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine* in print to help educate the public on the issue of food safety. Every food service professional in this country should read it to remain vigilant in protecting the public against foodborne illness and to always keep food safety top of mind. Thank you for putting out such a great magazine at a time when our country really needs it.

Daniel Traster
Former Dean of Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management,
Stratford University
Falls Church, Va.

DEAR EDITOR: I received a copy of the first issue of *be FoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine* with a letter attached signed by you. My mother is Jean Hillery and the tribute to her and Tom Quadros in the back of the magazine was truly appreciated. Thank you for sending it.

Jo Ann Hillery

“ The magazine has an excellent and eye-catching design. It is well edited and the careful selection of subject matter and submissions shows the hand of a true craftsman. ”

FSIS welcomes your comments about *be FoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine*. Please send letters to the editor to beFoodSafeMagazine@fsis.usda.gov or write to *be FoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine*, USDA/FSIS/SIPO, Aerospace Building, 3rd Floor - Room 405, 14th and Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250, or fax them to (202) 690-6519.

DEAR EDITOR: Thank you for sending us an advance copy of FSIS' new publication, *beFoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine*. The National Meat Association staff is very impressed with this latest communications effort.

The magazine has an excellent and eye-catching design. It is well edited and the careful selection of subject matter and submissions shows the hand of a true craftsman. Overall, a fully professional project, *be FoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine* raises the bar not only for FSIS and within USDA but we hope with other government agencies, as well.

If there's any constructive criticism we might have, it's that the title is somewhat cumbersome, but overall *the magazine* is a top-notch effort.

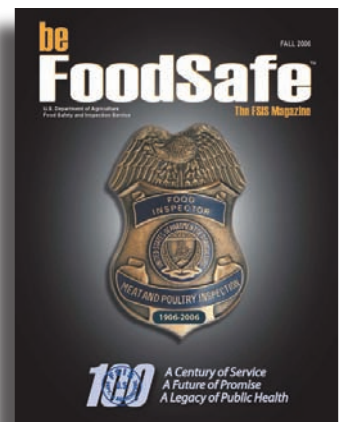
We look forward to seeing more copies on a regular basis.

Rosemary Mucklow
Director Emeritus, National Meat Association

DEAR EDITOR: A copy of the new USDA magazine arrived at my home recently. Other inspectors also downloaded a copy of the article ("Seniority Rules!" in Around the Agency) and congratulated me for my long career and many accomplishments. I should like to thank you for publishing the article. I appreciate it very much. I did not expect to get this type of recognition in my lifetime. It was like going from rags to riches.

Thank you again!

Dr. P.A. Allen
Senior Veterinary Medical
Officer, USDA, Food Safety
and Inspection Service



Fighting Foodborne Illness

USDA Enlists Public Health, Medical Communities



By Matthew D. Baun

When you think of the work of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, images of farmers and ranchers quickly come to mind. But there is an ambitious effort at USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service to expand that circle to include the medical and public health professions. Targeting the public health community is a growing necessity because of changes in the nation's demographics.

Defining "At-Risk"

For instance, there is a growing population of people with weakened immune systems. This group is at greater risk for contracting a foodborne illness that may result in dangerous infections, hospitalization, or even death. Since all people are dependent on food to survive, everyone, *in theory*, is at-risk for foodborne illness. But in reality, certain people are more vulnerable than others and thus are known as "at-risk." The distinction is important. A healthy individual may suffer only minor effects from eating undercooked food, resulting in an upset stomach. Others, however, can suffer far worse conditions, such as acute kidney failure.

But as they look to enlist the help of professionals who have a direct relationship with those who are "at-risk," many USDA officials see signals that the medical community is ready and willing.

Some physicians are talking to their patients about food safety just as they would about stroke or heart-attack prevention. And for USDA this spells good preventive medicine and protects the public health.

"As a general rule, we don't give patients food safety information in our program," said Dr. Sam James, Director of Kidney/Pancreas Transplant Program, University Medical Center, Tucson, Ariz. "Now that I've become a little bit more aware of the food safety issues, I think that we should include food safety information in our patient packet."

Those who fall in the "at-risk" category are people who we know and see every day — an older parent, a young child, a pregnant woman, people with diabetes, or even those with high blood pressure. Patients with weakened immune systems like transplant recipients, and those with HIV/AIDS, cancer, and diabetes are also at higher risk than healthy individuals for severe illness or death due to foodborne illness.

USDA is also reaching out to those who may not have a medical condition but are nonetheless considered "at-risk" — older adults and young children. Surveys conducted by USDA show that individuals in these demographics, or their caregivers, are often more receptive than other people to actually adopting safe food handling behaviors.

Jennifer Doe, a Chevy Chase, Md., pediatrician who is part of a practice that treats about 500 people each week, makes it a point to address foodborne illness with the parents of her young patients.

"We see a wide spectrum of illnesses that can develop as a result of foodborne pathogens, from mild to serious," said Doe. "Foodborne illness is super important to [parents of] infants and young children because the young ones do not have completely developed immune systems, so they're not able to fight off things that you and I can."

A Public Health Mission

Targeting “at-risk” populations is just the latest evolution of health maintenance at USDA. Agriculture officials have talked about food safety in terms of public health for years. Food safety educators throughout the United States, and allies from state and local government as well as industry and consumer groups, have added their voice to the cause of raising food safety awareness.

But what USDA and FSIS officials want is this *call to action* to grow louder so more people can hear and then heed the food safety messages being espoused. Over the next few years, FSIS hopes to strengthen its network of food safety partners by forming relationships with county and city public health officials, physicians, nurses, hospice workers, and other caregivers. These stakeholders are viewed as untapped resources that are potentially able to deliver key food safety messages to people who need them most.

The idea is a simple one that carries a lot of potential. If a doctor, for example, will take the time to explain the impact foodborne pathogens have on people with weakened immune systems, then these patients will be empowered to prevent it from occurring.

As a measure of how important USDA officials are taking this effort to reach out to the medical and public health communities, FSIS last fall sponsored a two-and-a-half day conference (*see related article on page 10*) that brought together the medical and public health communities with food safety educators from all areas of the country.

The idea behind the conference was to have attendees discuss various strategies for communicating the food safety needs of “at-risk” individuals. Agriculture Secretary Mike

Johanns, a keynote speaker, endorsed the mission of the conference and saluted the more than 600 attendees for their work to improve public health through food safety.

Johanns said that while certain groups of people are “at-risk,” the degree of risk can change through concentrated education efforts. “Who better to deliver the message than some of the most trusted people in the world, our doctors, our nurses, and our public health professionals? You have tremendous credibility and influence; you can make a difference.”

“At-Risk” — A Familiar Face

Those who are considered “at-risk” may never actually encounter foodborne illness. But because there is some degree of risk every time food is eaten, ‘at-risk’ individuals always have to take extra precautions. The simple act of eating lunch or dinner at a restaurant is a challenge in and of itself.

“I have no immune system, so something that wouldn’t bother someone else could make me very sick,” said Jane Sanchez, a lung transplant patient in Milton, Fla.

As a consequence, Sanchez is extremely careful in the way she goes out to eat. In order to handle salt and pepper shakers, napkins and other rudiments of the dinner table she wears plastic gloves. She’ll even wear gloves when she prepares meals in her own home, in addition to frequently washing her hands.

USDA officials believe that engaging the public health and medical communities on food safety issues will reduce the rates of human foodborne illness cases. They hope patients like Sanchez will get the food safety messages they need to help them enjoy a better quality of life and protect them from foodborne illness.

Uniting the Stakeholders

To help make inroads into the world of physicians and public health officials, USDA officials don’t have to look very far for help. Richard Raymond, M.D., Under Secretary for Food Safety at USDA, is the nation’s highest ranking food safety official. Raymond’s perspective is unique. As a practicing family physician he treated patients and is fully aware of the vulnerabilities and physical toll foodborne illness has on people. Raymond has also been at the forefront of many public health issues, having served as Nebraska’s chief medical officer as well as serving as President of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.



Joan Mondschein, a kidney transplant patient, receives counseling from Dr. Sam James, Director of the Kidney/Pancreas Transplant Program, University Medical Center, Tucson, Ariz. (Photo courtesy of the 2006 Food Safety Education Conference)

Continued on page 16 ...



USDA Secretary Mike Johanns visits the FSIS Food Safety Education exhibit booth at the 2006 Food Safety Education Conference in Denver, attended by Susan Conley, Director of Food Safety Education at FSIS, and Barbara O'Brien, Deputy Director.

Food Safety Conference Focuses on Those Most "AT-RISK"

By Matthew D. Baun

The 2006 Food Safety Education Conference in Denver this past fall proved to be a gathering post for ideas, strategies and information on improving the level of food safety in the United States. Titled *Reaching At-Risk Audiences and Today's Other Food Safety Challenges*, the conference sparked an ongoing dialogue among the more than 600 food safety and health professionals in attendance.

The primary mission of the conference was having attendees explore the various ways of reaching those most "at risk" for foodborne illness with critical food safety messages. The "at-risk" demographic is a sizable one. Nearly one in five Americans fall into this category and it includes young children, older adults, pregnant women and those with a weakened immune system — people with diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS and transplant recipients.

"We have a common goal with the public health and medical communities to save lives, and food safety is definitely an integral part of that," said Bryce Quick, Deputy Administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and a speaker at the conference. "It was exciting to see how public health professionals, the medical community, the food industry, food safety educators and consumers came together at this conference."

The behind-the-scenes efforts provided attendees access to a comprehensive program of more than 80 exhibits and posters, more than 30 breakout sessions and numerous keynote speeches by top USDA and public health officials in the United States.

Attendees left these sessions with a better understanding of how to reach "at-risk" audiences while receiving the latest information on behavioral and attitudinal research, effective social marketing strategies and innovative approaches to reaching the "at-risk" and underserved populations. Attendees also learned about successful programs being used to train and educate caregivers such as foodservice workers, and even those who prepare meals in their own homes.

Conference attendees also received a strong dose of encouragement from leading USDA and public health officials who described their valuable contributions to improving public health while suggesting areas where public health and food safety issues can be improved.

Adm. John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., M.P.H., Assistant Secretary for Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, referred to conference attendees, many of whom came from state and local health agencies, as his "army" in the national fight against public health threats, including foodborne illness.

A pediatrician, Agwunobi is the nation's highest ranking public health officer. He encouraged conference



Under Secretary Dr. Richard A. Raymond, USDA Office of Food Safety, presents the FSIS Bauman Award to R. Bruce Tompkin for his continued dedication to food safety.

Photos courtesy of the 2006 Food Safety Education Conference

attendees to network and communicate with each other so their ideas and successes would be known to other public health professionals.

Agwunobi also issued a challenge to the conference attendees by asking them to take the message to underserved populations in the United States.

“We still don’t reach into racial and ethnic communities the way we do the majority,” said Agwunobi. “There are still gaps in taking that high step of food safety into these underserved communities around the nation.”

Attendees also heard from another national figure on the public health scene, Georges C. Benjamin, M.D., Executive Director of the American Public Health Association.


Benjamin said public health officials should take pride in the work they do even though they never get to see the faces of the people they help through their work and dedication.

Benjamin encouraged conference attendees to become better communicators in order to more effectively engage the public on critical health issues. He encouraged public health professionals to seek out opportunities in order to raise awareness.

“ We still don’t reach into racial and ethnic communities the way we do the majority ... There are still gaps in taking that high step of food safety into these underserved communities around the nation. ”



Adm. John O. Agwunobi, M.D.
Assistant Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services

“Too often in the public health community we talk to ourselves, listen to ourselves, and answer our own questions,” said Benjamin. “We fail to engage critical stakeholders like the general public, policy makers, and the business community. It is time to change for the sake of the people we serve.” 

EQUIPPING THE AT-RISK

Targeted Materials for the Immune-Compromised

By Tanja K. Allen

“Food Safety for the At-Risk: A Brochure Series for the Immune-Compromised,” a new series of publications, is targeted to persons most susceptible to foodborne illness. These at-risk groups include the very young, pregnant women, older adults and those with a weakened immune system who may experience lengthier illness, hospitalization or even death should they contract a foodborne illness.

The series comprises five brochures that provide a comprehensive, yet consumer-friendly overview of safe food-handling principles. They include:

- ♥ *Food Safety for Transplant Recipients,*
- ♥ *Food Safety for Older Adults,*




- ♥ *Food Safety for People with Diabetes,*
- ♥ *Food Safety for People with Cancer,* and
- ♥ *Food Safety for People with HIV/AIDS.*

The brochures will help to promote safe food-handling behaviors among the select at-risk groups and their caregivers. FSIS expects that the medical community will also find the information useful in educating their patients about food safety.

“Sharing food safety information with all Americans — particularly at-risk groups — and encouraging positive behavior modification

during food preparation and consumption is critical in reducing their exposure to pathogens known to cause foodborne illness,” said Cmdr. Janice Adams-King, a U.S. Public Health Service, Commissioned Corps Officer and a member of FSIS’ Food Safety Education Staff.

FSIS will promote the use of the brochure series among the respective at-risk groups, their caregivers, the medical community and food safety educators. They will be available at national, state and local conferences and from FSIS on the Web at www.fsis.usda.gov, by e-mailing fsis.outreach@usda.gov or by contacting the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline. 

By Maxine Hillary

food safety in a

Markets

We've all heard the news reports that highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza, or bird flu, outbreaks are still affecting parts of Asia, Europe, the Near East and Africa, and that human infections from direct contact with infected birds continue to occur. From the outset, the Food Safety and Inspection Service has been preparing to respond to any concerns the public might have about the safety of domestic poultry. While the threat of an incident of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza is not entirely remote, the U.S. Department of Agriculture continues its work to significantly reduce the chance of infected birds being imported commercially into the United States.

Lowering this risk does not come without considerable effort. Karen Stuck, FSIS Assistant Administrator for the Office of International Affairs, is charged with ensuring that products coming into the United States from other countries are safe for consumers.

Exporting a meat, poultry or egg product into the United States isn't easy, according to Stuck. Products may be imported only from those countries meeting strict criteria. Furthermore, FSIS import inspectors ensure that USDA's restrictions on imports of certain meat and poultry products are enforced, such as poultry products from countries and/or regions where highly pathogenic avian influenza has been detected.

"A country is approved for export on the basis of having an inspection program that is equivalent to the U.S. system. Many countries adopt the same system we have, but we still look at their laws and regulations to

make sure that their system is actually equivalent to ours," she said.

A legal review is followed by random FSIS visits to a country's plants to ensure that their systems are equivalent. FSIS officials verify that food safety, sanitation and humane handling standards of a country's inspection system are, in fact, being met. After a country becomes eligible to export to the United States, product still must pass another inspection at the U.S. port of entry. FSIS inspection program personnel use a computer system to randomly select labeled boxes for physical examination to verify that what is in the box is accurately stated on the label and to ensure that the product is safe and wholesome.

International trade is essential to the U.S. economy. Although U.S. production of meat, poultry and egg products can satisfy America's market, "it's still a good

Did you know?

- ▶ FSIS employs about 74 inspectors to monitor food brought into the United States from foreign destinations.
- ▶ Customs has hundreds of entry points, and much of the meat and poultry imported into the United States can come through

any of them. It then needs to go to an import inspection facility. These facilities are located at about 30 border locations.

- ▶ Imports are inspected in official import establishments as opposed to boats, planes or trains.
- ▶ The United States imports more than \$8.5 billion worth of meat, poultry and egg products each year.

Global marketplace

idea to allow other countries to export to the United States,” said Stuck. “We import so we can export —trade works two ways. For a lot of countries, if you are not going to import their products, they are not going to import yours.”

In all, about 38 countries are permitted to export meat, poultry and egg products to the United States. “For some U.S. trading partners,” said Stuck, “the American market is all important.”


Another organization working to ensure the safety of imported food is the Codex Alimentarius Commission, or Codex, created in 1963 by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization to develop food standards, guidelines and codes of practice. Codex’s main purposes are protecting public health and ensuring fair trade practices.

“While Codex standards are not enforceable like laws, adhering to them is good business,” said Paulo Almeida, Associate Manager for the U.S. Codex office at FSIS. “The idea is that if there is a global consensus on what a particular standard for a food product should be, then, if a producer of that product meets the standard for one country, the producer meets the standard for all countries.”

The Commission alternates meeting sites between Rome and Geneva, but much of the “real” work goes on before Codex delegates even arrive.

“We work on consultation on the technical level and get a pretty good sense of where we are going,” said Almeida. “Then we take it to a committee chaired by the USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety.”

The Under Secretary’s counterparts from the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Commerce and the Environmental Protection Agency come to an agreement. “By the time the U.S. delegate gets to a Codex meeting, he or she knows what to promote and support and also has options with which to negotiate,” said Almeida. “It’s not all or nothing.”

So whether the issue is avian flu or determining whether another country’s inspection system is equivalent to the U.S. system, Americans who consume imported beef, poultry and egg products can be confident that the products are safe, regardless of their origin. Likewise FSIS, working with global partners on Codex issues, will remain engaged in a dialogue that will ensure the safety of meat, poultry and egg products imported from other countries. 

- ▶ Approximately 6 to 8 percent of meat consumed in the United States comes from outside our borders.
- ▶ In 2006, 44 percent of the meat and poultry products imported to the United States came from Canada.
- ▶ The United States imports more eggs than it raises here. Most of these imports are

processed into low-cholesterol egg substitutes or commercial eggs prepared for restaurants and other institutional settings such as hospitals.

- ▶ FSIS inspectors have seized products such as fish balls, squid, tilapia and frog legs disguised as eligible meat and poultry products at U.S. ports of entry.

Join the “Be Food Safe” Campaign

By Robyn Sadagursky
and CiCi Williamson



“Be Food Safe.”
Three simple words
— but a declarative
phrase that’s effective
in the fight against
foodborne illness.

These three words
are the theme for a
new multimedia public
education campaign that’s crucial
to preventing foodborne illness. “Be
Food Safe” uses new consumer-
tested materials and messages to
encourage consumers to change their
behavior and maintain those changes.
The new educational effort continues
to focus on the safe food-handling
behaviors of “Clean, Separate, Cook
and Chill,” which were created for
the Fight BAC!® campaign by the
Partnership for Food Safety Education.

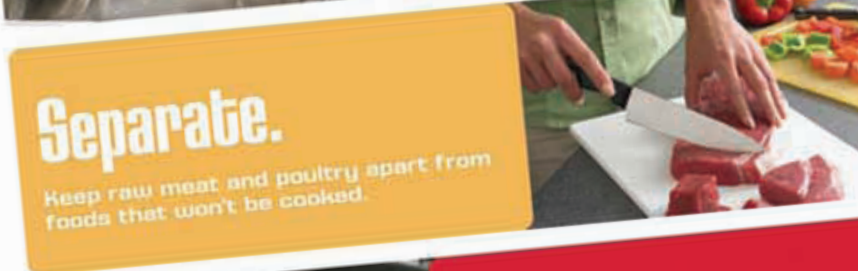
“Be Food Safe” is an educational
program grounded in social
marketing, behavior change, and risk
communication theories. It delivers
specific safe food-handling messages
to help consumers understand the simple steps
they can take to prevent foodborne illness. The
program provides educators with the tools to
inform consumers about foodborne illness and
raises the overall level of awareness of the
dangers associated with unsafe handling and
undercooked food.

USDA developed “Be Food Safe” in
cooperation with the Partnership for Food Safety
Education, the Food and Drug Administration, and
the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Clean.

Wash hands, utensils and cutting boards before and after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs.



Separate.

Keep raw meat and poultry apart from foods that won't be cooked.



Cook.

Use a food thermometer - you can't tell if food is cooked safely by how it looks.



Chill.

Chill leftovers and takeout foods within two hours and keep the fridge at 40°F or below.

Food handling safety risks at home are more common than most people think. The four easy lessons of Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill can help prevent harmful bacteria from making your family sick. Be food safe from USDA! To find out more about food safety visit befoodssafe.gov or call 1-888-MPHotline

© United States Department of Agriculture



“Our partners
already use many successful campaigns,”
said Susan Conley, Director of Food Safety
Education at USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection
Service. “We designed ‘Be Food Safe’ to be an
umbrella campaign that will work with existing
educational efforts.”

Why “Be Food Safe”?

Research shows that Americans are aware
of food safety but they need more information
to achieve and maintain safe food-handling
behaviors. Using the easy-to-remember theme,

“Be Food Safe” empowers consumers to achieve and maintain safe food-handling behaviors. The campaign’s focus on the four basic safe food-handling behaviors, “Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill,” provides the framework for communicating the specific safe food-handling information consumers need.

Preventing foodborne illness is one of the USDA’s and its partners’ top priorities. This year about 5,000 people in the United States will die from foodborne illness — approximately 14 people each day. More than 325,000 people are hospitalized each year for foodborne illness and approximately 76 million cases occur annually. That’s why everyone needs to “Be Food Safe.”

The Campaign

As part of the program, a partner’s toolkit was created to provide the essentials needed to spread the “Be Food Safe” message in a variety of different forums. It features a DVD containing ready-to-use print and radio advertisements, feature articles, a poster and other tools educators can customize and use to run an effective, co-branded campaign.

“Radio public service announcements, TV video news releases, magazine print ads and eye-catching consumer materials are part of this energizing endeavor to enlighten consumers on the

steps necessary to prevent illness from the foods they eat,” said Conley. “And there is more to come — a TV

spot, brochure and other materials are scheduled for production in 2007.”


At the dedicated Web address befoodsafe.gov, partners can download the customizable print materials and consumer publications. The blank areas on the items are designed for partner organizations to add their names and logos to leverage the credibility of trusted national and local sources for food safety information.

Proof Positive

“Be Food Safe” is adopted from a proven earlier approach: “Is It Done Yet?” the USDA pilot-tested public health paid advertising campaign. The pilot, conducted in August 2004 in partnership with the Michigan State University’s National Food Safety and Toxicology Center, was designed to increase the use of food thermometers in Michigan. “Is It Done Yet?” targeted suburban parents with children under the age of 10. After the two-week media outreach campaign, 50 percent more targeted parents thought about using a food thermometer when cooking or grilling, and thermometer usage among the target audience increased by about 9 percent.

Based on this successful model campaign, the tools that partners needed were created for them to use in taking these food safety education messages to local media outlets, reaching consumers nationwide. The success of the current program depends upon partners reaching as many consumers as possible.

Help Others “Be Food Safe”

Partners — whether in education, public health, processing or retailing — can help achieve momentum for the “Be Food Safe” message and have a greater positive impact on consumer behavior than the federal government alone. This public-private partnership is essential in promoting the “Be Food Safe” message, generating attention, and gaining momentum for this exciting new education campaign. It is time to spread the word to help all consumers and for America to “Be Food Safe.” 

E-mail befoodsafe@fsis.usda.gov to request your “Be Food Safe” Partner Toolkit.

Toolkit includes:

- Print Ads
- Poster
- Partner’s Campaign Guide
- Campaign Components
- DVD



Read Labels to Reduce Risk of Getting Sick

By Keith Payne


What's the difference between "ready-to-eat" and "ready-to-cook"?

An enormous one if you're not careful, which is why USDA recommends that you read all food product labels very carefully.

"Ready-to-eat" means just what it says — the food does not require cooking or any additional preparation by the consumer before it's eaten.

Phrases such as "cook and serve," "ready to cook" and "oven ready" on labels convey to consumers that the product is not ready to eat and should be accompanied by validated cooking instructions. Although products might appear to be cooked, partially cooked or browned, you should prepare these foods no differently than if you were handling a raw product.

Many frozen stuffed poultry products, such as those filled with cheese and other ingredients, are typically not ready to eat and *must* be fully cooked as if they were raw. Because these products are stuffed with additional ingredients, they will likely take longer to cook than products, such as chicken breasts, that do not contain fillings to reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165° F.

If the label mentions that a microwave oven can be used, then always follow the cooking instructions carefully. Cover and rotate so it heats evenly and always use a food thermometer to take multiple temperature readings in different locations throughout the product. This will ensure that the product is safely cooked. 

... Continued from page 9

In his role at USDA, Raymond has a clear vision for reaching what some might consider non-traditional stakeholders for USDA.

"It's just high time we began to remind people the 'and' in Food Safety and Inspection Service means we have a bigger role than *just* inspection," said Raymond. "We do want to become known as the public health branch of the USDA."

In addition to sponsoring last fall's food safety conference, which drew attendees from nearly every U.S. state and eight countries, FSIS unveiled a new series of brochures that can be used by medical and public health professions as well as other caregivers. These brochures offer food safety recommendations to people with specific medical conditions like HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes and transplant recipients as well as older adults. (see "Equipping the At-Risk" on page 11)

Inspection and Education

All this talk about education isn't to say that Raymond is placing less of a priority on inspection — quite the contrary. Raymond believes the food safety education programs and the meat, poultry and egg product inspection programs at USDA work in lock-step. Both are integral to meet the goal of seeing a sustained decrease in the number of human foodborne illness cases.


Raymond explains that just as FSIS targets its food safety education efforts toward those who are considered "at-risk," the agency also focuses its inspection resources on the products and facilities that pose the greatest risk to public health. This is called "risk-based inspection."

"What we're after is a commonsense, cost-effective public health strategy that best serves the American consumer and the meat and poultry industry by preventing human illness and, in turn, protecting those most at-risk from foodborne illnesses."

To make it work, Raymond is a firm believer in the farm-to-fork approach. The traditional group of players in the farm-to-fork continuum included the usual USDA players: ranchers, food processors, food distributors, grocers, food service professionals and consumers. But Raymond wants to invite more to the table — physicians, nurses, hospice workers, state and county health officials and, *really*, any other caregiver.

So how will these "new" stakeholders benefit from USDA's work on behalf of food safety?

Reflecting back to his days as a practicing physician, Raymond is quick to assert that foodborne illness is among the most under-reported diseases in the nation. The first step, he says, is for doctors and public health professionals to develop a more accurate system for reporting of foodborne illness. He notes that milder cases of food-related illness are often not detected through routine surveillance.

"This has serious negative consequences on our ability to understand the food safety environment we are operating in and our ability to obtain the support for the funding needed to combat foodborne illnesses. This information is absolutely necessary in order to create and guide prevention efforts and assess the effectiveness of our food safety regulations." (Cmdr. Janice Adams-King contributed to this article.) 

FROM THE **editor-in-**
Chief

Behind *be FoodSafe*: Clarity at the Core

The editorial philosophy of *be FoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine* is to present compelling information in an accessible and understandable way with insight and perspective that will benefit readers from both the public and private sectors. Contemporary design and compelling graphics will also help tell the story that is the complex world of food safety.

Our goal is to eliminate what I have frequently titled the “dead language of government,” or the regulatory rhetoric that can be mind numbing and uninspiring to the majority of our readers. There is no reason why government publications — at any level — have to be inscrutable, dense, and hard to understand. *be FoodSafe* strives to provide a mechanism — both in print and online at befoodsafe.gov — to painlessly access important information as well as learn the rationale and reason behind developing topics.


Our first issue (Fall 2006) celebrated the Centennial of the 1906 Meat Inspection Act, which provided the essential foundation for USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service to protect the food supply today. We also highlighted the important mission being carried out every day by FSIS’ workforce of approximately 10,000 Americans from all over the country: protecting public health.

This issue and those going forward will cover food safety at all levels — from the farm and the butcher shop down the road, to the complexities of international trade standards. Our coverage is designed to translate complicated issues into plain and useful information.

For instance, we devote our cover story to how the public health community — as well as average citizens — can better serve the growing “at-risk” population, or those who are more susceptible to foodborne illnesses than otherwise healthy adults.

The surprising fact about those considered “at risk” is that as many as one in five Americans falls into the category. And those who don’t, at the moment, may sometime also face a similar challenge to their health and well-being. Ensuring that food handlers take the necessary safety and sanitary precautions at all levels of the production, processing and distribution system will save lives. And that responsibility also extends to the home, where so much of the care giving for “at-risk” individuals takes place. Sometimes care giving can be rote, or an afterthought, and we now know that kind of approach can have tragic consequences. So, it’s time to recognize how sometimes the seemingly inconsequential to some can be vital for others.

Another goal of *be FoodSafe* is inclusiveness. We want to offer as many voices as possible; particularly those that contribute to a better understanding of the challenges we face today. Please feel free to contact us directly at beFoodSafeMagazine@fsis.usda.gov.

There will never be a final word when it comes to food safety. However, there will be many critical moments, and it is our hope that *be FoodSafe* will provide clarity to subjects that may be confounding at present, as well as context and relevance that advance public health in a significant way. 



By Daniel P. Puzo

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the next issue of

be
FoodSafe

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Q How do you keep
food safe during a
power failure?

A During a power out-
age, the refrigerator
will keep food cold
for about 4 hours if it
remains unopened. A full
stand-alone freezer will
hold the temperature for
approximately 48 hours
(24 hours if it is half full) if
the door remains closed.
The freezing compartment
in a refrigerator-freezer may
not keep foods frozen as
long. If the freezer is not
full, quickly group packages
together so they will retain
the cold more effectively.
To learn more about when
to save and when to throw
out specific foods, see our
"Keeping Food Safe During
an Emergency" publication.



Ask Karen

"Ask Karen" is the
USDA Food Safety and
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food safety question.
The automated response
system is available 24/7
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