



## FOOD SAFETY

### *Background*

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is responsible for ensuring that meat, poultry, and egg products are safe, wholesome, and properly labeled and packaged. The Department is also responsible for assuring that State meat and poultry inspection programs for commerce within that State are at least equal to Federal standards. In addition, products imported from other countries must be produced by a system that is equivalent to that employed by the United States. USDA statutory authority lies with the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, and the Egg Products Inspection Act. In 2005, FSIS employed over 7,600 inspection program personnel in about 6,000 federally inspected establishments nationwide with an annual cost of \$815.1 million.

In 1996, FSIS established the Pathogen Reduction and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (PR/HACCP) system. Under the HACCP system, facilities must institute preventive and corrective measures at each stage of the food production process where food safety hazards could occur. The HACCP system involves both industry and Government, which work together to ensure that the Nation's food supply is safe and secure.

From 2003 to 2004, the number of pathogen-related recalls declined nearly 18 percent. In addition, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest a decrease in the incidence of infections from foodborne illnesses from the 1996-98 baseline to 2004: incidences of *Yersinia* infections dropped by 45 percent; *E. coli* O157:H7 declined 42 percent; *Campylobacter* decreased by 31 percent; and *Listeria monocytogenes* fell 40 percent.

### *General Opinions Expressed*

- Several wanted the ban on interstate shipment of State-inspected meat to be lifted.
- Some wanted a permanent and comprehensive ban on downers entering the food supply.
- Some wanted more funding for local slaughter facilities. A few stated that local farmers should be able to sell directly to consumers.
- A few were concerned about the health, safety, and quality of imported food. Some commenters requested that all imported food products have the same standards as U.S. food products.
- Many felt that the current farm bill assures the public of a safe food supply. Others questioned this notion, indicating that agricultural expansion and concentration fueled by farm payments had added to food safety issues.

- A few noted that all regulation increases costs; farm policy should include regulation that is science-based, affordable, and effective.
- Some expressed interest in the Government continuing to focus resources on enforcing and improving food safety regulations.
- Several commenters were concerned about the use of irradiation. A few noted that irradiated food is safe but faces a perception problem.
- A few want reindeer, meat rabbits, and bison to be amenable species (subject to mandatory inspection paid for by the Government).

### *Detailed Suggestions Expressed*

- Engage with other countries to upwardly harmonize global import standards for beef; those standards must rely on sound science and World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) standards.
- Make the American public aware that a safe food system is worth the cost.
- Ban imported meat that is less safe and not produced free-range, antibiotic-free, or hormone-free.
- Concern was expressed with overuse of antibiotics in animals and its human health implications. Collect data on antimicrobial resistance and make it available to the public.
- Allow inspection of downer cows that have broken legs but are otherwise healthy.
- Oppose horse slaughter.
- Do not stop the export of horse meat to foreign countries.
- Employ more FSIS meat inspectors to work the line in the large processing plants rather than using HACCP inspection.
- Eliminate HACCP.
- Encourage support for regulations and flexibility that impact what can be done in small processing units.
- Farm bill should address health of food processing workers.
- Support a federally funded pilot project on mini-packing facilities.
- Continue full funding for food safety and anti-agroterrorism and anti-ecoterrorism endeavors, because it is important for national security that the food supply be protected.
- Government's regulatory gauntlet precludes 99 percent of new products from alternative producers from entering the marketplace.
- High cost and regulatory hurdles are hindering a number of custom slaughterhouses from becoming USDA-inspected.
- Invest in agricultural research focused on food safety.
- Keep contaminants out of human food.
- Need was expressed for radical reform of processing-facility conditions to avoid E. coli outbreaks.
- Regulate free-range eggs to better the lives of chickens used for their egg production.
- Safe food is critical but then allow markets to determine premiums for quality.
- Exempt small farmers from all food safety laws.
- Test for chemical residues on imported products.
- Enhance food security with many small processing areas and food staple locations—it is harder to disrupt 20 small locations than one or two major plants.

- Regulations are an entrance barrier for new processing facilities.
- Concern was expressed that small processing facilities are closing.
- Support was expressed for 100 percent inspection of imported food at no cost to USDA.