

## **PRESIDENT'S FOOD SAFETY WORKING GROUP: DELIVERING RESULTS**

On March 14, 2009, President Barack Obama announced the creation of a new Food Safety Working Group to advise him on how to upgrade the U.S. food safety system. The Working Group is recommending a new, public health-focused approach to food safety based on three core principles: (1) prioritizing prevention; (2) strengthening surveillance and enforcement; and (3) improving response and recovery. To implement this approach, the Obama Administration is announcing the following steps.

**Preventing *Salmonella* Contamination:** *Salmonella* bacteria cause over a million illnesses each year in the United States – including fever, diarrhea, and even death. The CDC has found that *Salmonella* is the most common bacterial cause of foodborne illness. For more than a decade, experts have known that eggs are a leading cause of *Salmonella* illnesses. Despite support from consumer advocates and the egg industry, the Federal government has been unable to finalize basic rules on egg safety to prevent contamination.

- **Reducing *Salmonella* in Eggs:** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is issuing a final rule to control *Salmonella* contamination of eggs during production. This rule is estimated to reduce the number of foodborne illnesses associated with consumption of raw or undercooked contaminated shell eggs by approximately 60%, or 79,000 illnesses every year, and will generate annual savings of over \$ 1 billion.
- **Cutting *Salmonella* Risk in Poultry Products:** By the end of the year, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) will develop new standards to reduce the prevalence of *Salmonella* in turkeys and poultry. The agency will also establish a *Salmonella* verification program with the goal of having 90 percent of poultry establishments meeting the new standards by the end of 2010.

**Reducing the Threat of *E. coli* O157:H7:** The bacterial strain called *E. coli* O157:H7 causes diarrhea, abdominal pain, and fever in approximately 70,000 Americans each year. In an estimated one in 15 patients, complications arise potentially resulting in intense pain, high blood pressure, kidney failure, and even death. In recent years, this bacterium has caused outbreaks associated with meat and spinach.

- **Stepped Up Enforcement in Beef Facilities:** FSIS is issuing improved instructions to its workforce on how to verify that establishments handling beef are acting to reduce the presence of *E. coli*. Also, FSIS is increasing its sampling to find this pathogen, focusing largely on the components that go into making ground beef.
- **Preventing Contamination of Leafy Greens, Melons, and Tomatoes:** By the end of the month, FDA will issue commodity-specific draft guidance on preventive controls that industry can implement to reduce the risk of microbial contamination in the production and distribution of tomatoes, melons, and leafy greens. These proposals will help the Federal government establish a minimum standard for production across the country. Over the next two years, FDA will seek public comment and work to require adoption of these approaches through regulation.

**Building a National Traceback and Response System:** A system that permits rapid traceback to the source of foodborne illness will protect consumers and help industry recover faster. Yet despite the dedicated efforts of food safety officials across the country, our current capacity to traceback the sources of illness suffers from serious limitations.

- **Developing Industry Product Tracing Systems:** Within three months, FDA will issue draft guidance on steps the food industry can take to establish product tracing systems improving our national capacity for detecting the origins of foodborne illness.
- **Creating a Unified Incident Command System:** Within three months, Federal agencies will implement a new incident command system to address outbreaks of foodborne illness. This approach will link all relevant agencies, as well as state and local governments, more effectively to facilitate communication and decision-making in an emergency.

- **Strengthening the Public Health Epidemiology Program:** Within six to twelve months, FSIS will improve collaboration with states by increasing the capacity of its successful public health epidemiology liaison program to State Public Health Departments through additional hires and expanded outreach.
- **Updating Emergency Operations Procedures:** Within the next month, Federal food safety agencies will ask State and local agencies to update their emergency operations procedures to be consistent with the new “Guidelines for Foodborne Disease Outbreak Response” soon to be issued by the Council to Improve Foodborne Outbreak Response. Implementation of these guidelines will lead to quicker response, better communication, and better coordination by all Federal, State, and local agencies.
- **Improving State Capacity:** The CDC will work with collaborating States to evaluate and optimize best practices for aggressive and rapid outbreak investigation, and will launch a new system to facilitate information-sharing and adoption of best practices within 12 months.
- **Using New Technologies to Communicate Critical Food Safety Information by Creating an Improved Individual Alert System:** The federal government will enhance [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov) to better communicate information to the public and include an improved individual alert system allowing consumers to receive food safety information, such as notification of recalls. Agencies will also use social media to expand public communications. The first stage of this process will be completed in 90 days.

**Improving Organization of Federal Food Safety Responsibilities:** Building a more effective safety system requires federal agencies to improve management of their food safety responsibilities and coordinate more effectively with each other.

- **Strengthening Federal Coordination to Address Cross-Cutting Problems:** The Food Safety Working Group will serve as a mechanism to break down stovepipes, address cross-cutting issues and increase coordination of food safety activities across the U.S. government. HHS and USDA will continue to serve as the Working Group’s leadership, bringing information and experience from the front lines of food safety to their sister agencies across the government. The Group will monitor the implementation of its recommendations, regularly assess performance metrics, ensure that food safety policies are adequately coordinated with efforts to safeguard the food supply from deliberate tampering, and respond to new challenges.
- **Clarifying Responsibilities and Improving Accountability:** FDA is creating a new position, Deputy Commissioner for Foods, to oversee and coordinate its efforts on food, including food safety. This position, reporting to the Commissioner, will be empowered to restructure and revitalize FDA’s activities and work with FSIS, and other agencies, in developing a new food safety system. Within the next three months, USDA will create a new position, Chief Medical Officer, at FSIS. This position will report to the Under Secretary for Food Safety, and will enhance USDA’s commitment to preventing foodborne illness.