



FOOD SAFETY AND LABELING

Issue:

American consumers deserve to have confidence that their food is safe and that the best science is used to ensure that the most wholesome product possible is produced and offered.

America's farmers and ranchers are committed to producing safe and affordable food for consumers in the U.S. and around the world. There are several reasons for their strong support for food safety. They have the same desire as other consumers to have a safe, abundant and affordable food supply. They also have an economic interest because the demand for their products is determined by consumer confidence.

Numerous nationwide food recalls have increased consumer awareness of food safety. At issue is whether the current food safety system has the resources, authority and structural organization to safeguard the health of American consumers against foodborne illness. Also at issue is whether federal food safety laws have kept pace with significant changes in food production, processing and marketing, such as new food sources, advances in production and distribution methods and the growing volume of imports.

Background:

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has identified 15 federal agencies that administer at least 30 laws related to food safety. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), within the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), within the Department of Agriculture (USDA), handle most of the government's food and safety regulatory system.

FDA is responsible for ensuring that all domestic and imported food products—except for most meat and poultry derived from the major animal species—are safe, nutritious, wholesome and accurately labeled. FDA shares responsibility for the safety of eggs with FSIS.

FSIS regulates the safety, wholesomeness and proper labeling of most domestic and imported meat and poultry and their products sold for human consumption. FSIS inspects all cattle, sheep, swine, goats and horses before and after they are slaughtered. FSIS also maintains oversight during meat and poultry processing into food products.

Regulatory Status:

On Jan. 4, 2011, the President enacted the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (P.L. 111-353). The legislation approved by Congress in 2010 aims to cooperatively improve food safety, building on existing systems already in place in the private sector. It authorizes new resources to increase risk-based inspections, expand research and training programs, and establish a pilot program for high-risk produce traceability.

FDA has finalized all seven major rules—Produce Safety, Preventive Controls for Human Food, Preventive Controls for Animal Food, Foreign Supplier Verification Programs, Third Party Certification, Sanitary Transportation and Intentional Adulteration. Now, FDA is in the process of implementing these rules, issuing guidance and training curriculum.

AFBF Policy:

Farm Bureau believes that any action by Congress should be based on sound science and prudent risk assessment.

Farm Bureau believes that USDA should be designated as the lead agency in the development of food safety guidelines.

Farm Bureau supports the following changes to improve the food safety regulatory process for consumers and producers:

- Adequate funding of the government's food and feed safety and protection functions;
- Increased education and training for inspectors;
- Additional science-based inspection, targeted according to risk;
- Research and development of scientifically based rapid testing procedures and tools;
- Increased funding for the Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank;
- Accurate and timely responses to outbreaks that identify contaminated products, remove them from the market and minimize disruption to producers;
- Indemnification for producers who suffer marketing losses due to inaccurate government-advised recalls or warnings; and
- Point of entry inspections being in addition to 'processing plant,' 'field' or other required U.S. government inspections in countries of product origin that should be funded through user fees paid by the importer.

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