

Food Safety, What is the Concern?

Highlights of testimony to US Congress

Provided by Sustainable Essentials Enterprises, LLC

Food Safety: What is the Concern?

Food safety is the assurance of health of the population by the elimination of foodborne pathogens.

Familiar foodborne pathogens include Escherichia coli (E.coli) O157:H7 in meat and apple juice; Salmonella in eggs, on vegetables and on poultry; Vibrio in shellfish; Cyclospora and hepatitis A virus on fruit; and Cryptosporidium in drinking water.

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) regulates 80 percent of the national food supply.

- FDA does not regulate meat, poultry, and certain egg products, which is regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- FDA's responsibility also extends to live food animals and animal feed.
- FDA is part of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
- Sister agencies to FDA include
 - Center for Disease Control (CDC) and
 - National Institute of Health (NIH).

A History of Statements Regarding Food Safety:

1999

-Jane E. Henney, M.D., Commissioner of Food and Drugs, (FDA) and Catherine E. Woteki, Ph.D., Under Secretary for Food Safety, (USDA)

Before the President's Council on Food Safety before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring, and the District of Columbia Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs

We are pleased to be here this morning to discuss the extremely important issue of protecting our nation's food supply....Even though Americans enjoy one of the safest food supplies in the world, every year tens of millions of Americans become sick and thousands die from illnesses caused by both domestic and imported food. The increasing quantities of food that are imported into the United States has raised some significant questions about our ability to protect consumers from potential hazards.....

For example, the hazard associated with a microbial pathogen, such as Salmonella, in a ready-to-eat food is potentially greater than in a product that will be cooked before eaten. As we all know, fresh produce and seafood can pose additional risks, particularly with emerging pathogens. Today [1999], 38 percent of fruit consumed by Americans, 12 percent of vegetables, and 50 percent of seafood are imported.

Today's challenges with respect to the food supply are complex. Much has changed in what we eat and where we eat. Americans are eating a greater variety of foods, particularly poultry, seafood and fresh fruit and vegetables. This is beneficial to our health, but presents greater food safety challenges. More consumers demand these foods year round, making safety issues surrounding transportation and refrigeration of increasing importance....

....as international trade expands, shifting regional commerce and products to a global marketplace, our role in ensuring the safety of food expands as well.

2000

Joseph A. Levitt, Esq. Director, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
Food and Drug Administration

“The Problem” statement before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

CDC has estimated that foodborne diseases cause approximately 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths in the United States (U.S.) each year.

There are many challenges that food safety agencies face in trying to reduce those numbers. People are eating a greater variety of foods, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables. As many of these foods are becoming available all year round, safety concerns associated with transportation and refrigeration arise. The rising amount of imported foods increases dramatically the number of potential sources of food contamination.

2006

Dr. Robert Brackett, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN)
Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
Dr. Lonnie J. King, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Response to E Coli Spinach outbreak of September
Before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

FDA’s and USDA’s efforts are working, and we are making progress. However, the recent E. coli outbreak shows that further progress is needed, particularly with ready-to-eat produce.

Ready-to-eat fresh vegetables, fruits, and prepared salads have a high potential risk of contamination because they are generally grown in a natural environment (for example, a field or orchard) and are often consumed without cooking or other treatments that could eliminate pathogens if they are present.

The number of illnesses associated with fresh produce is a continuing concern of the Agency [Food and Drug Administration FDA]

2008

David Acheson, M.D., F.R.C.P. Assistant Commissioner for Food Protection (FDA)

Response to Salmonella Saintpaul outbreak
Before the Subcommittee of Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and
Technology House Committee on Homeland Security

FDA appreciates the opportunity to discuss the recent foodborne illness outbreak associated with fresh produce contaminated with Salmonella Saintpaul and the measures we are taking to enhance the safety of fresh produce and to enhance traceability... There is no question that the Salmonella Saintpaul outbreak investigation has been one of the most complex investigations in recent memory. I assure you that FDA is committed to working with all our food safety partners to examine ways to remove or mitigate some of the complicating factors to expedite tracebacks [ability to find source of contamination through labels on produce].

2010 FDA INVESTIGATING E. COLI AT ARIZONA LETTUCE FARM

Friday, May 07, 2010 **Associated Press**



An Ohio food company is recalling lettuce sold in 23 states.

WASHINGTON — Federal investigators are looking at a farm in Yuma, Ariz., as a possible source of a widespread E. coli outbreak in romaine lettuce, according to the distributor.

Freshway Foods of Sidney, Ohio, said Thursday it recalled lettuce sold in 23 states and the District of Columbia because of a possible link to an E. coli outbreak that has sickened at least 19 people — three with life-threatening illness.

College students at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Ohio State in Columbus and Daemen College in Amherst, N.Y., are among those affected by the outbreak, according to health departments in those states.

Vice president Devon Beer said Freshway Foods worked with the Food and Drug Administration to trace the contaminated lettuce to a Yuma grower, whom he did not identify.

The recall only applies to romaine lettuce with "best if used by" date before or on May 12, when Freshway Foods stopped buying its romaine from Yuma, Beer said. The recall also affects "grab and go" salads sold at Kroger, Giant Eagle, Ingles Markets and Marsh grocery stores.

The lettuce was sold in Alabama, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

FDA spokesman Ira Allen would not confirm that the source was in Arizona, but said the investigation has focused on a farm.

"Experience tells us that the point of contamination is likely at the farm level, which can then be spread during the entire processing chain," Allen said.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - May 6, 2010 - Sidney, Ohio – Freshway Foods is voluntarily recalling products containing romaine lettuce with a use by date of May 12 or earlier because they have the potential to be contaminated with *Escherichia coli* O145 bacteria (*E. coli* O145). The products were sold under the Freshway brand and Imperial Sysco brand. The company is working with U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to inform consumers of this recall.

TABLE 1. U.S. FRESH PRODUCE IMPORTS BY LARGEST SUPPLIERS, 2002

Product	Metric Tons	Percentage of Total Imports	Percentage of Product by Country
Total Fruit	7,417,776		
Bananas	4,144,627	55.9	
Ecuador	1,094,600		26.4
Guatemala	968,941		23.4
Costa Rica	914,235		22.1
Melons ^a	680,275	9.2	
Guatemala	213,393		31.4
Costa Rica	174,159		25.6
Mexico	128,106		18.8
Grapes	518,267	7.0	
Chile	399,015		77.0
Mexico	103,175		19.9
Pineapples	405,714	5.5	
Costa Rica	344,731		85.0
Total Vegetables^b	3,178,567		
Tomatoes	859,502	27.0	
Mexico	723,425		84.2
Canada	100,499		11.7
Peppers	401,159	12.6	
Mexico	322,627		80.4
Canada	41,545		10.4
Cucumbers/Gherkins	394,040	12.4	
Mexico	334,681		84.9
Vegetables, Fresh	351,239	11.1	
Mexico	293,685		83.6
Potatoes	281,890	8.9	
Canada	281,785		99.9
Onions and Shallots	270,243	8.5	
Mexico	157,468		58.3
Canada	55,133		20.4

Source: USDA data.
^aExcludes watermelons.
^bIncludes potatoes.

Registration of Food Facilities:

Section 305 of the Bioterrorism Act requires registration of foreign and domestic food facilities that manufacture, process, pack, or hold food for consumption by humans or animals in the U.S. However, due to strong opposition from the European Union and its European Commission and the National Coalition of Food Importing Association, it is unclear as to whether the Section 305 Act continues to apply or be adhered to by non-US

entities. The EC stated that “the Bioterrorism Act has significant consequences for existing trade patterns” and Richard Koby of NCFIA stated in 2003 that

“While NCFIA strongly endorses the purposes of the Bioterrorism Act and the Proposed Rule, we believe that FDA lacks the statutory authority to apply the Bioterrorism Act's recordkeeping and records inspection provisions to foreign facilities and that the records access provisions of the Proposed Rule fail to expressly incorporate the statutory limitation on such authority.”

Records show that FDA had for the first time in 2004 a roster of foreign and domestic food facilities that provide food for American consumers. As of July, 2005,

- 261,391 facilities had been registered.
- 114,462 were domestic
- 149,929 were foreign facilities (2010 reports suggest 230,000+ facilities)

Certainly the number of foreign facilities has increased dramatically since 2004.

In 1996 it was reported by the FDA to the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Foreign Development, and Related Agencies Senate Committee on Appropriations

“Meanwhile, the resources allocated to the inspection of imported foods have actually decreased. In 1992, we received approximately 1.1 million line items of imported foods and had 631 supported Full Time Equivalent employees (FTEs) to look at those items. By 1997, our line items more than doubled to approximately 2.7 million but budget limitations caused us to cut our supported FTEs to 565.”

In 2002 an additional 800 FDA workers were added of which a “large portion” were applied to food inspection positions.

Food Safety Summary:

Food Safety is particularly challenging in regards to fresh ready-to-eat foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables. The demand of consumers for year round access to desired foods has dramatically increased the amount of food imported to meet demand. This increases the demand on already under-resourced Federal officials responsible for the safety of the food supply. The desire of the consumer is to have locally grown produce for optimal freshness and nutrition. The ability to meet the demand, year round, for fresh fruit and vegetables with locally grown produce would lessen the overtaxed burden of government officials and reduce the need to attempt to enforce US regulations in foreign countries.

One other item of note is that in the aftermath of 9/11 of 2001 the US began to recognize and focus its attention in 2003 thru 2006 on the issue of Food Security. This explains the gap from 2000 when the FDA clearly stated “The Problem” of safe food until 2006 when the global expansion of markets meeting the US demand for organic foods forced a focus back from “food security” to “food safety”

Sustainable Essentials Enterprises, LLC Terraponics Technologies™ and SuperGrow Facilities™ is ideally suited to facilitate the expansion of local organic farms that provide safe and secure produce to local markets.