



# Celebrating 100 Years

The Food Safety and Inspection Service celebrated 100 years of meat inspection by commemorating the centennial anniversary of the signing of the Federal Meat Inspection Act on June 28, 2006, in Washington, D.C.

President Theodore Roosevelt signed the FMIA into law on June 30, 1906, requiring that meat products be inspected and that federally inspected slaughterhouses and processing plants operate under sanitary conditions.

## photo Album



USDA photo by Bob Nichols



# AT-RISK

## Ready to “be FoodSafe”

By Cmdr. Janice Adams-King, U.S. Public Health Service

One in five — yes, 20 percent of the U.S. population are more at-risk for contracting a foodborne illness that may result in a lengthier illness, hospitalization or even death. Foodborne illness, a preventable public health challenge in the United States, poses a greater risk to infants, young children, pregnant women, the elderly and anyone with a weakened immune system.

Reducing one's exposure to pathogens that cause foodborne illness requires action along the entire farm-to-table

continuum. For at-risk consumers, it is critical that food safety educational efforts be targeted to address the everyday meals on table — the end of this continuum. These higher risk consumers are ready to listen and ready to change their behavior.

Social marketing research by FSIS demonstrates that implementing culturally appropriate safe food-handling communication strategies effectively promotes safe food-handling behaviors among at-risk populations and/or their caregivers.

For instance, young children who consume a food product contaminated

with *E. coli* O157:H7 are more susceptible to acute kidney failure due to a massive breakdown of red blood cells, a condition known as hemolytic uremic syndrome. FSIS research shows that parents of young children, once they are informed, are willing to use a food thermometer to make certain their hamburgers have reached a safe internal temperature of 160° F, hot enough to kill *E. coli* O157:H7.

### Spread the Message

Contact FSIS to request this and other brochures from the at-risk series and find out about other targeted food safety outreach tools and campaigns. Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), e-mail the Hotline at [mpholine.fsis@usda.gov](mailto:mpholine.fsis@usda.gov) or go to the FSIS Web site at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov). At the Web site, consumers with food safety questions can “Ask Karen,” the FSIS virtual representative available 24 hours a day by clicking on “Ask a Food Safety Question” on the home page.





A pregnant woman receives dietary counseling at a Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program clinic in Virginia. (USDA photo by Ken Hammond)

## Consumers, particularly these at-risk populations and their caregivers, are interested in preventing foodborne illness, once they have a better understanding of the risks, behaviors and consequences.

**P**regnant women make up another at-risk group. If listeriosis, for example, were contracted and transmitted to the unborn child, then miscarriage, stillbirth or other serious medical conditions may result. Again, FSIS research demonstrates that once informed, pregnant women are willing to modify their food consumption patterns to protect their unborn children.

“Parents of young children told us that health professionals and USDA are the two most trusted sources for information about safely preparing

food,” said Susan Conley, Director of Food Safety Education at FSIS.

“Public health professionals, including clinicians who interact with these populations, are positioned to be a primary communication channel for providing safe food-handling messages to at-risk populations.”

Other groups at risk include infants because their immune systems are not fully developed and the elderly because they have decreased immune and other system functions due to the aging process. These situations make them more susceptible to any infectious organism,

and contracting a foodborne illness may result in life-threatening conditions.

Still others who have weakened immune systems due to medication, including chemo- or immunosuppressive therapies and/or chronic disease, such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, or liver disease, may also develop life-threatening conditions such as sepsis and meningitis due to foodborne illness. FSIS found that transplant recipients are willing to improve their safe food-handling practices to prevent contracting a foodborne illness when made aware of risky behaviors and safer practices.

Consumers, particularly these at-risk populations and their caregivers, are interested in preventing foodborne illness, once they have a better understanding of the risks, behaviors and consequences.

“These at-risk groups have a need and desire for food safety information that resonates with them,” said Conley. “In response, FSIS has developed a brochure series for specific at-risk audiences to assist them with reducing the risk of foodborne illness to keep themselves and their families safe.”

# “Ask Karen”

## Virtual Food Safety Specialist

By CiCi Williamson

**F**ood safety specialists at the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline personally answer customers' questions weekdays on the toll-free line. But they're also the brains behind “Ask Karen,” the automated information source on the Food Safety and Inspection Service's Web site.

With a database of more than 9,300 food safety questions maintained by the Hotline, “Ask Karen,” a virtual representative, or vRep, is available 24/7 worldwide. Because “Ask Karen” never sleeps, she's ready with an answer whenever you have a question.

How can this innovative Web tool help you? Say you forgot to put your dinner leftovers in the refrigerator. Now, you're ready for a 3:00 a.m. snack. But are these morsels still safe to eat? Or, maybe you're traveling, writing a newsletter in the early hours of the morning, and you need the answer to a food safety question. Is there anybody awake you can ask?

It doesn't matter if it's 3 o'clock in the afternoon or 3 o'clock in the morning. Because “Ask Karen” is available on the FSIS Web site, you can type in your question at any time, from any place. Since its launch in April 2004, more than 29,000 customers have done just that and asked more than 91,000 questions.

“More than 20 years of research and experience from the Hotline went into creating the database,” said Diane VanLonkhuyzen, the Hotline's manager. “Hotline staff knew what people might ask.” This knowledge has grown into the extensive database that is now at Karen's virtual fingertips. In fact, when launched, “Ask Karen” had the largest number of Q&As in the software developer's rollout history. You can be confident that the answers you receive from “Ask Karen” are based on up-to-the-minute information. The Hotline's food safety experts continue to research new science-based answers, often with the assistance of other FSIS divisions.

In addition to responding instantaneously with answers, this cutting edge tool provides links to other Web pages with additional information. Not sure what to ask? Choose questions by category. By clicking the “Help” button, you'll find more than 100 categories from which to choose. Questions in the database relate to meat, poultry and egg products, safe handling, food storage, food preparation, food inspection, food recalls and many other topics.

“Ask Karen” was listed as one of the Government's “Best Practices” at [www.webcontent.gov](http://www.webcontent.gov). Through this and other venues, “Ask Karen” is used by other government agencies as a model of how to assist the public with finding answers to questions and to help identify the public's needs for food safety information. 🗣️



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**ASK KAREN: I can answer questions from the public about the prevention of food-borne illness, as well as the safe handling, preparation and storage of meat, poultry and egg products, from an extensive database of food safety information.**  
===== ”

**Q** How do I know if my chicken is fully cooked and safe to eat?

**A** Using a food thermometer is the only sure way of knowing if your food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy foodborne bacteria. All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165° F as measured with a food thermometer. A whole chicken must reach a minimum internal temperature of 165° F throughout the bird. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook poultry to higher temperatures.



Visit **ASK KAREN** at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)  
Click on “I Want To ... Ask A  
Food Safety Question”

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



# IN MEMORIAM

JEAN HILLERY *and* THOMAS QUADROS



*To our dedicated colleagues who exemplified courage, professionalism and commitment and, as a result, gave the ultimate sacrifice to protect and serve the American people. Jean Hillery and Thomas Quadros were pioneers in ensuring public health protection in the United States and we will always remember them for their skill, intelligence and bravery.*

FSIS Compliance Officers Jean Hillery and Thomas Quadros and Senior Special Investigator Bill Shaline of the California Department of Food and Agriculture were fatally shot June 21, 2000, while performing their assigned duties at a processing plant in San Leandro, California. *(Photos courtesy of Will Gillingwater)*

*Don't miss the next issue!*

# be FoodSafe™

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Food Safety and Inspection Service

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