



United States Department of Agriculture

# USDA Accomplishments 2009-2012

Secretary Tom Vilsack

## Food Safety

Since the founding of the President's Food Safety Working Group in 2009, USDA has collaborated extensively with other federal partners to safeguard the food supply, prevent foodborne illnesses and improve consumers' knowledge about the food they eat. We are working to strengthen federal efforts and develop short-term and long-term strategies that emphasize a three-dimensional approach to prevent foodborne illness: prioritizing prevention; strengthening surveillance and enforcement; and improving response and recovery.

### Prevention

- USDA better protected consumers by adopting a zero tolerance policy for raw beef products containing six additional strains of shiga-toxin producing E. coli, prohibiting them like USDA already prohibits E. coli O157:H7. Enforcement to detect these dangerous pathogens and prevent them from reaching consumers began in March 2012.
- USDA expects to prevent as many as 25,000 foodborne illnesses annually thanks to tougher standards we set for Salmonella and new standards for Campylobacter which will reduce the occurrence of these pathogens in poultry.
- USDA announced a new "test and hold" policy that could have prevented 44 recalls of unsafe foods between 2007 and 2009. It was implemented fully in December 2012. Facilities will be required to hold product until microbiological testing can determine it is safe to release into commerce. This policy will significantly reduce consumer exposure to unsafe meat products.
- USDA launched the Public Health Information System, a modernized, comprehensive database that will allow the Agency to identify public health trends and food safety violations more effectively at the nearly 6,200 plants where FSIS ensures the safety of the products produced.
- USDA began testing of additional components of ground beef, including bench trim, and issued new instructions to our employees asking that they verify that plants follow sanitary practices in processing beef carcasses. And we issued consolidated, more effective field instructions on how to inspect for E. coli O157:H7 contamination.

## Consumer Information

- To further engage consumers and educate them about the importance of food safety at home, USDA teamed with the Ad Council to develop a national, multi-media food safety public education campaign to prevent cross-contamination and to ensure proper cooking and chilling. This multimedia campaign, developed in English and Spanish, uses a variety of media, including television, radio, print, social media tools and the Internet to highlight the importance of the four basic safe food handling practices: clean, separate, cook and chill. The campaign will educate consumers in order to help reduce foodborne illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.
- USDA is requiring clearer product labels so consumers will know whether products they are purchasing contain added solutions that might not be apparent. We are also requiring nutrition labels on single-ingredient raw meat and poultry products to provide more information to consumers. The process for approving generic labels also is being streamlined, which will help product manufacturers get new products onto store shelves more quickly. This efficient new approval process should result in approximately \$8.7 million in cost savings over the next 10 years.

## Research

- Last year, USDA funded more than \$70 million for food safety research, education and extension projects that will help build a modern public health system that meets the evolving needs of the farm-to-fork system.
- USDA conducts and funds food safety research to generate real-world results for both government and the private sector. We are particularly proud of recent work that patented new technology that protects pasteurized liquid eggs, work that looked at the safety of beef trim imports and efforts that led to the publication of the first draft genomes of six dangerous non-O157 strains of E. coli.

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