

Combine All U.S. Food Safety Functions into a Single Agency, the Food Safety Administration. Support S. 654, H.R. 1148 -- The Safe Food Act.

Americans are told that we have the safest food supply in the world. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 76 million people suffer from food-borne illness each year, resulting in 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths. Children and the elderly are most likely to experience severe cases of illness and death from food-borne pathogens. Outbreaks, like the one that occurred last fall from tainted spinach, can easily exceed \$100 million in damages to both victims and the industry.

Part of the problem is the patchwork nature of our food safety system. Today, multiple agencies -- including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) -- are in charge of ensuring a safe food supply. Twelve different federal agencies and 35 different laws govern food safety and inspection functions. With so many bureaucrats in the kitchen, breakdowns can and do occur.

A single agency with one mission -- ensuring that the food we eat is safe -- would reduce the risk that contaminated food could make its way from the farm to the fork. Passing the Safe Food Act would mean safer food.

Better and (for Many Plants) More Frequent Inspections

Today's system lacks accountability and consistency. For instance, inspectors from the USDA inspect every meat and poultry processing facility every day, but the FDA inspects other facilities, including those that produce high-risk foods, like seafood and eggs on average once every five years.

As a result of infrequent inspections and inconsistent standards, every correction is made food-by-food, outbreak-by-outbreak. At a time when food is mass-produced and shipped all over the world like no other time in history, this approach to addressing food safety problems is a hazard to the public's health. For example:

- In September 2006 a multi-state outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 from bagged fresh spinach sickened 204 people and killed at least 3, causing consumers nationwide to question the safety of leafy greens. Two months later, two simultaneous outbreaks of E. coli O157:H7 were linked to lettuce served in large restaurant chains. The two outbreaks caused over 150 people to become ill at Taco Bell restaurants in the Northeast and at Taco John restaurants in the Midwest. These outbreaks linked to leafy greens brought into question the safety of produce that was not formerly considered dangerous. The leafy green industry, regulated by FDA, clearly needs more oversight to ensure the safety of produce such as lettuce and spinach.
- In early 2007, tainted peanut butter caused 628 cases of Salmonellosis across the nation. The same strain of Salmonella was traced to a peanut butter plant in Georgia, where contamination likely came from moisture in the plant due to a leaky roof and faulty sprinklers.
- In March, a massive recall of over 100 pet food brands worried pet owners and policy-makers alike, when investigations revealed the source of the illnesses as being a intentionally-contaminated ingredient imported from China. Imports are rarely inspected in this country, and while this instance killed hundreds of pets, a future incident could easily harm hundreds of humans.
- Also this summer, Castleberry's Food Company recalled over 90 different types of canned chili, meats, and dog food, after four people become ill with botulism. Botulism, a risk that can

arise in improperly processed canned food, is a serious illness that causes progressive motor paralysis. Castleberry's manufactures various canned products, which are sold under various labels, making this massive recall difficult to institute. Weeks after the initial recall, the products were still found on grocers' shelves.

Eliminate Waste and Confusion; Improve Accountability

USDA inspects meat and poultry; the FDA oversees the safety of all other foods; and EPA sets tolerances for certain chemicals in food. This regulatory system proves confusing, wasteful and highly ineffective:

- A frozen *cheese* pizza is subject to inspection by the FDA, which usually inspects a factory once every 10 years. A frozen *pepperoni* pizza falls under the jurisdiction of the USDA, which performs almost daily inspections.
- Imported foods are treated differently depending on whether they are regulated by the FDA or the USDA. While USDA approves the foreign meat and poultry plants that want to export to the U.S., FDA cannot even visit the foreign food processors that are linked to outbreaks of illness in this country without the invitation of the foreign government.
- Lettuce and other leafy greens have caused a number of outbreaks from *E. coli* and *salmonella* normally associated with meats. Although we have USDA inspectors who visit farms, they don't inspect the crops for safety. FDA, the food safety agency most likely to regulate leafy greens, doesn't inspect on the farm unless there is an outbreak. Fresh vegetables of all kinds fall through the cracks of our current food safety system.

An independent Food Safety Administration could better address known hazards in the food supply. The proposed Food Safety Administration would also empower a single agency to enforce food safety regulations from farm-to-table. Research could be better coordinated within a single agency rather than among multiple programs, and new technologies to improve food safety could be approved and used more rapidly.

The Safe Food Act fixes our broken food safety system by:

- Establishing the Food Safety Administration, a single agency responsible for ensuring the safety of the nation's food supply;
- Requiring domestic and foreign food processors to register, be inspected more frequently based on risk, and implement measures to control and reduce harmful contaminants and pathogens in food;
- Improving the safety of imported foods by requiring imported food to meet the same level of safety as that of food produced domestically;
- Appointing a Food Safety Administrator with authority to detain and seize any food, food ingredient or animal feed that is believed to be unsafe for consumption, is adulterated, or is misbranded; and
- Replacing the current voluntary recall system with a procedure for issuing a mandatory recall when unsafe food is found on store shelves.

We cannot afford to continue to have multiple systems for food safety. The only way to achieve a successful and efficient hazard-control based system of food safety regulation is to combine those programs into a single agency with uniform standards for addressing food hazards.

**Take Action to ensure food safety for American consumers.
Support the Safe Food Act.**

Each year, millions of people become ill and up to 5,000 die from contaminated food. The Safe Food Act would give the government better tools to clean up America's food supply. [Write a letter](#) in support of the Safe Food Act. A project of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and the Safe Food Coalition. For more information, call 202/332-9110, or write foodsafety@cspinet.org.