



## How does federal policy protect the food supply?

### Takeaways:

- The nation's food safety system does not adequately protect the food supply.
- In January 2013, the Food and Drug Administration proposed new rules that aim to strengthen safety measures, but gaps in the approach and insufficient funding leave Americans at risk.
- A coherent, integrated food safety system is needed to truly protect the nation from foodborne illness.

### Overview

Each year, roughly 48 million Americans get sick from foodborne diseases, 128,000 people are hospitalized and 3,000 die from related complications.<sup>1</sup> Federal policy has provided basic safeguards in America's food system for more than a century, but the current system is inadequate. Newly proposed federal rules by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that would implement key provisions of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) of 2011 could improve many of these safeguards. Yet additional measures are needed to strengthen the nation's food safety system.

### A FRAGMENTED FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM

The nation's food surveillance system is fragmented. The FDA oversees most of the U.S. food supply, but several other federal offices and a complicated network of state and local agencies are also

responsible in some way. This complexity poses safety challenges.

Additionally, the nation's food supply is changing. A growing demand for imported foods has stretched limited FDA resources—fewer than 1 percent of imported foods now are inspected—while new foodborne pathogens and bioterrorism risks continue to threaten the global food supply.

### CHANGES THROUGH THE FSMA

The FSMA provides important upgrades for the nation's food safety system. Spurred by widespread E. coli and salmonella outbreaks in 2010, the law seeks to curb foodborne illness by focusing more on prevention—in contrast to past food safety legislation, which focused primarily on outbreak response.

The FSMA empowers the FDA to:

- Implement comprehensive, prevention-based controls in the food-supply chain and, for the first time, issue suspensions and mandatory recalls to enforce inspection and compliance.
- Ensure that imported foods meet U.S. food safety standards by increasing importer accountability and rejecting imports from facilities the FDA is not permitted to inspect.
- Develop a coherent, integrated national food safety system by strengthening collaboration among local, state, and federal agencies, as well as foreign governments and companies.

Rules proposed by the FDA in January 2013 to implement core provisions of the FSMA aim to strengthen safety measures. One proposal would

### Top Five Pathogen-Food Combinations

Pathogen-Food Combination	Cost of Illness	Illnesses	Hospitalizations	Deaths
Campylobacter in Poultry	\$1.3 billion	608,231	6,091	55
Toxoplasma in Pork	\$1.2 billion	35,537	1,815	134
Listeria in Deli Meats	\$1.1 billion	651	595	104
Salmonella in Poultry	\$700 million	221,045	4,159	81
Listeria in Dairy Products	\$700 million	434	397	70

Source: [www.rwjf.org/publichealth/product.jsp?id=72267](http://www.rwjf.org/publichealth/product.jsp?id=72267)

require processed food manufacturers to adhere to stricter protocols to help reduce the risk of contamination in their products. Another proposed rule would create stronger standards for fruit and vegetable farms that would help combat harmful bacteria, such as *E. coli*. The FDA estimates that, if implemented and fully funded, these rules would prevent approximately 1.75 million illnesses in the United States each year.<sup>2</sup>

### SETTING PRIORITIES

Federal leadership is needed to set and enforce food safety priorities. With drastic cuts in health departments across the country,<sup>3</sup> an integrated national food safety system is more important than ever. A 2011 report found that 14 pathogens in foods cost the United States \$14 billion annually in human disease. It also found that eradicating the top five pathogens from the foods in which they are most prevalent would reduce that public health burden by 90 percent.<sup>4</sup>

An effective food safety system depends on collaborating with stakeholders at every juncture of

food production and distribution to enhance efficiency and improve public health. These stakeholders include federal, state, and local regulatory agencies; food producers, manufacturers and distributors; and other private partners.<sup>5</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The newly proposed rules that call for implementing key parts of the FSMA are a big step to updating America's 1930s-era food safety system. Yet, the nation's fragmented food safety system still faces significant challenges, including a lack of funding that could undercut efforts to implement and enforce important safety measures. A more comprehensive and collaborative approach that focuses on prevention is needed to better protect American families and improve public health.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- [The Food Safety and Modernization Act](#)
- [Food Safety \(Trust for America's Health\)](#)
- [Ranking the Risks: The 10 Pathogen-Food Combinations With the Greatest Burden on Public Health \(UF Emerging Pathogens Institute\)](#)
- [MakeOurFoodSafe.org](#)

<sup>1</sup> [www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/index.html)

<sup>2</sup> [www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/UCM334116.pdf](http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/UCM334116.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/lhdbudget/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=188273](http://www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/lhdbudget/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=188273)

<sup>4</sup> [www.epi.ufl.edu/?q=RankingTheRisks](http://www.epi.ufl.edu/?q=RankingTheRisks)

<sup>5</sup> [www.foodsafety.gov/news/fsma.html](http://www.foodsafety.gov/news/fsma.html)