

Food Safety

Promoting an Efficient, Effective, Transparent, and Collaborative FDA

Quick Facts

- CDC estimates 1 in 6 Americans suffer from foodborne illness annually.
- FDA regulates 78% of the U.S. food supply, including all fresh fruits and vegetables.
- FDA also has primary regulatory responsibility for tobacco, vaccines, drugs, medical devices, etc. which are substantially better funded than food.

Background

Food, with the exception of meat, poultry, and a few other products, are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. FDA is led by a Commissioner who has historically been a medical doctor with more expertise on the 'drug' side of FDA than 'food'. Congress rarely questions the Commissioner on food related issues. From a budget perspective, funding for food and nutrition programs pales in comparison to other FDA programs. Despite having limited resources, FDA has not fully taken advantage of external partnerships. Only recently has the agency demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with industry to assess and encourage produce safety prevention strategies and partner on food safety training opportunities. Historically the agency has remained insular, resulting in a lack of trust

by the produce industry. Issues are especially evident—and jeopardize public health—when foodborne illness outbreaks occur. Within the agency, there are several centers and offices that play major roles in setting policy, conducting outbreak investigations, and enforcing food safety regulations. FDA recently proposed consolidating parts of the agency into a Human Foods Program. Our hope is that this will address previous issues with delays in rule making, policy setting, and enforcement. This proposed structure, combined with increased interest by Congress—both House and Senate, and including those with responsibilities for appropriations as well as oversight, presents an opportunity for IFPA to help frame produce safety regulation for the future.

Food Safety Regulatory Reform Today

The regulation of food is too important to be an afterthought within the FDA, behind pharmaceuticals, vaccines, tobacco, and medical devices. Consumers and industry alike deserve sensible, efficient, effective regulation of food and want the rapid resolution of issues when they occur. A safer food supply is possible by leveraging partnerships and working in the spirit of true partnership. We seek the following:

- Support FDA appointment of a Deputy Commissioner for Foods, with accountability to the commissioner and direct authority over all food-related components and operations of the Agency, who will lead a cultural transformation increasing the effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, and collaboration of the FDA.
- Transparent accounting of FDA expenditures, within the food arena, which would help us assist the agency in bolstering its funding and identify opportunities to leverage partnerships and outside resources
- Consideration of foodborne illness outbreak evaluation models that are inclusive of FDA and CDC while also engaging stakeholders including industry experts.
- Consistent and transparent policies and enforcement actions that balance public health concerns with the important role produce plays in the diet.