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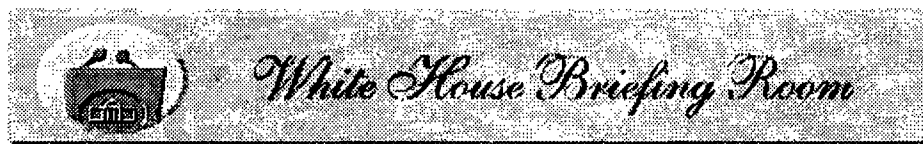
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May 22, 1998

**VICE PRESIDENT GORE LAUNCHES COMPUTER NETWORK TO FIGHT
FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS**

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Vice President

For Immediate Release:

Contact:

Friday, May 22, 1998

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VICE PRESIDENT GORE LAUNCHES COMPUTER NETWORK
TO FIGHT FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS

New Food Safety System Five Times Faster At Locating Serious and Wide-Spread
Food Contamination Problems

Washington, D.C. -- Addressing a problem that affects 33 million Americans each year, Vice President Gore announced today a new national computer network that will be five times faster at identifying and combating food-borne illness.

PulseNet -- a national computer network that identifies outbreaks of food-borne illness -- will enable public health laboratories across the country to use the Internet to provide alerts when outbreaks of food-borne disease occur.

"President Clinton and I are committed to finding ways to ensure that the food Americans put on their tables is safe," said the Vice President, who was joined at a White House ceremony by Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman. "With this efficient new computer network, we can more effectively trace widespread foodborne disease outbreaks and warn millions of Americans to stay away from contaminated food products."

In as little as 48 hours, PulseNet can identify rogue E.coli strains in foods by identifying the distinctive DNA fingerprints of pathogens found in both food sources and the patients suffering from gastric illness. In 1993, it took three weeks to track an rogue E.coli contamination in hamburger meat produced by single source.

PulseNet will link food safety investigators at the Centers for Disease Control, the Food and Drug Administration, the Agriculture Department, four key area laboratories and state health departments to link directly with the PulseNet database.

As of today, epidemiologists in the following states will be on PulseNet -- Massachusetts, Minnesota, Texas, Washington, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin. The CDC plans to have all states on the network by 1999.

This important Administration initiative will reduce the number of Americans who suffer from episodes of food-borne illness and prevent over 9,000 deaths a year. This initiative is part of the Vice President's effort to reinvent government through partnerships at state and federal agencies and make smart use of the latest technology.

The Vice President also announced the formation of FORCG (pronounced Force G), a partnership of federal and state agencies to better respond to food-borne illness outbreaks.

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May 22, 1998

Feds Plan Food Illness Computer Web

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Filed at 1:17 p.m. EDT

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Outbreaks of foodborne illness will be more easily tracked and more quickly handled in all 50 states under a new government **computer network**.

Unveiling a new computer web today, dubbed PulseNet, Vice President Al Gore said it will enable investigators to identify outbreaks five times faster than is possible now. A new task force will also coordinate rapid-response efforts by federal, state and local agencies.

"We will make sure that when food-safety outbreaks cross the lines of states or jurisdictions, they don't fall through the cracks," Gore said. He called PulseNet "part of early-warning system for danger at the dinner table."

"By saving crucial time, it will save lives," he said.

The move is the administration's latest effort to reduce the estimated 9,000 deaths and 33 million illnesses caused by foodborne pathogens each year. Previous efforts include issuing new guidelines to farms and food processors on how to guard against contamination and adopting new inspection techniques at meat and poultry plants.

The network will use the computer Internet to link the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the Agriculture Department, four laboratories and state health departments together.

This will enable officials to quickly identify pathogens like E. coli in illness outbreaks using the DNA of the bacteria found in the contaminated food and in patients who are suffering from gastric problems.

The DNA "fingerprint" of the pathogen could then be quickly transmitted

around the country to determine how widespread the outbreak is and what should be done to combat it, such as a product recall.

Caroline Smith DeWaal, food safety director at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, said the current government FoodNet system only tracks such outbreaks in a few states and cannot cope with a large-scale outbreak.

“There are huge gaps,” she said Thursday.

FoodNet was used to identify the E. coli strain that sickened people in Colorado last year after they ate contaminated ground beef from Hudson Foods Co., resulting in a recall of 25 million pounds of meat. Yet the extent of the outbreak could not be tracked nationally.

“We will never really know how big that outbreak was,” DeWaal said.

Agriculture Department statistics show that in 1997, the existing FoodNet network confirmed more than 8,000 human illnesses traced to seven foodborne pathogens, including E. coli, salmonella, campylobacter and listeria. The new network, Gore said, will work even better.

Beginning today, PulseNet will link epidemiologists in Massachusetts, Minnesota, Texas, Washington, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin. The remaining states will be hooked up by 1999.



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Andrei H. Cherny @ OVP

05/21/98 07:03:44 PM



Record Type: Record

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acronym

To: Jean.logan @ npr.gov @ inet, Tom.flavin @ npr.gov @ inet

cc: Jerold R. Mande/OSTP/EOP

Subject: Food Safety

**Remarks by Vice President Al Gore
Food Safety Announcements
Friday, May 22, 1998**

This weekend, millions of Americans will join their families and friends to celebrate Memorial Day with backyard barbeques. And during this holiday weekend, we want Americans to have peace of mind when they reach for a piece of food. Today, I am pleased to make two announcements that will help ensure that the food our families serve to their children is fresh, safe, and free from danger.

wholesome

among

From the time President Clinton and I took office, we have worked hard to make sure that the food Americans eat -- already the safest in the world -- is even safer. We put into place improved safety standards for meat, poultry, and seafood products, and expanded research, education, and surveillance throughout the food safety system. We took action to keep harmful pesticides off our fruits and vegetables, and created protections against dangerous contaminants in our drinking water. We launched a new program to prevent and control outbreaks of food-borne illness, and reinvented the meat and poultry inspection system for the first time since President Teddy Roosevelt. We are using the out-of-this-world technology of NASA to tackle an all-too-real problem here at home.

summary as many as

We still have much more to do. Each year, ~~more than 30~~ ^{up to} million Americans will become ill from eating unsafe food -- and ^{up to} 9,000 will die. And small children and the elderly are the most vulnerable of all. At the dawn of a new century, it is simply unacceptable to be plagued by this old problem.

One important way to meet this challenge is through reinventing government. In the past 5 ½ years, our efforts in this area have made our government smaller and leaner, saving billions and billions of dollars. But reinventing government is also about making government work better -- especially in critical areas such as food safety: Helping agencies share information and save time when there is an outbreak, and every second counts. Harnessing the latest technology to speed our response to food-borne illness across the nation. Reinventing government has already increased food safety throughout this country, and I am pleased that we are taking important

new steps in this direction.

Today, I am announcing two new actions that will help ensure that the food we eat and the water we drink is even safer than it is today. First, today I am announcing the creation of a new national computer network that will enable public health laboratories to identify food contamination up to five times faster than today. This new PulseNet network is an early warning system for danger at the dinner table -- and by saving crucial time, it will save lives.

is part
of our

Along with finding food contamination early on, we need better ways of dealing with the problems we do find. Today, bacterial illnesses are distributed from a single point to restaurants, grocery stores, and homes all over America. They cross state lines and even national boundaries without even slowing down. And they cross lines of federal jurisdiction just as easily. The time has come for better coordination to meet new and growing threats to our food safety, for avoiding unnecessary duplication, and for responding to food safety problems faster and better than ever before.

Today I am pleased to announce the creation of ForcG [force-G] -- the Foodborne Outbreak Response Coordinating Group -- a new task force that will bring together federal, state, and local agencies to provide quick and effective response to food safety problems where and when they happen. We will make sure that when food safety outbreaks cross the lines of states or jurisdictions, they don't fall through the cracks.

This summer, when Americans are about to bite into a tasty hamburger or a juicy peach, they shouldn't have to fear that their food will bite them back. With the latest technology of PulseNet and the partnership of ForcG, we are two steps closer to giving Americans the peace of mind they deserve this summer -- and in every season to come. Thank you.

a bowl of
raspberries

Food Safety Event**Friday, May 22, 1998, 12:15 p.m. (1/2 hour)****Roosevelt Room**

Briefing prepared by Jean Logan

BACKGROUND TO MEETING

Food safety has been a priority of the Administration since early 1993; better coordination and better science were key recommendations of the original NPR taskforce. The federal agencies responsible for food safety continue to reinvent the way they work with each other and their partners, to ensure a safer food supply for the American public. The innovations being announced today emphasize partnership and smart technology, and are a direct result of the Administration's Food Safety Initiative.

Congress has directed the National Academy of Sciences to study the possibility of a single federal food agency, and their report is due in August.

PURPOSE OF EVENT

First, to reinforce the commitment of the Administration and the federal food safety agencies to reinvent our food safety system to better ensure safe food for Americans, and to recognize all the work that has already been done.

Secondly, to announce the formation of **PulseNet**, a national network of food laboratories that will help rapidly identify and stop outbreaks of foodborne illness.

In your remarks you will also announce the formation of **FORCG** (pronounced Force G), a partnership of states and federal agencies to respond to foodborne illness outbreaks. But the big news will be PulseNet.

PARTICIPANTS

Secretaries Shahala and Glickman, and Nancy Donley, Founder of STOP (Safe Tables Our Priority) who lost her 6 year old son to foodborne illness.

In the audience will be representatives from the state and federal labs, consumer groups, and industry groups.

Acknowledgements will be provided tomorrow morning.

YOUR ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION

Reaffirm the longstanding commitment of the Administration to reinvent food safety

Recognize the federal agency partnership that is reinventing food safety

Highlight the use of partnerships, better science and cutting edge technology to create a safer food supply

Announce FORCG, and Pulsenet

Push the agencies to take their partnership further

Prior to event, photo with co-inventors of Pulsenet, Drs. Bala Swaminathan, and Susan Hunter (who uses a wheelchair)

ATTACHMENT

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MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
AMONG
THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND
THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
AND
THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

I INTRODUCTION

A. Parties

The parties to this agreement are the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

B. Background

While the American food supply is among the safest in the world, there are still millions of Americans stricken by illness every year caused by the food they consume, and some 9,000 a year — mostly the very young and elderly — die as a result. The threats are numerous and varied, ranging from *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 in meat and apple juice, to *Salmonella* in eggs and on vegetables, to *Cyclospora* on fruit, to *Cryptosporidium* in public drinking water supplies — and most recently, to hepatitis A virus in frozen, sliced and sugared strawberries.

In his January 25, 1997 radio address, President Clinton directed three Cabinet members — the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of HHS, and the Administrator of the EPA — to identify specific steps to improve the safety of the food supply. Their May, 1997, report to the President identified several problem issues and outlined a comprehensive new initiative to address those problems and improve the safety of the nation's food supply.

One issue addressed in the report to the President was the coordination among federal, state and local agencies in responding to interstate outbreaks of foodborne illnesses.

Three federal agencies are charged with responding to outbreaks of foodborne illness (for the purpose of this MOU, foodborne illness also includes waterborne illness): USDA, EPA, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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at HHS. Each of the three federal agencies has a potentially critical role when an outbreak occurs. CDC's primary responsibility is to assist state and local health departments in investigating outbreaks of illness and in identifying the cause of the outbreak. FDA, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) at USDA and EPA also have responsibility for determining whether a product they regulate may be causing illness, and for halting the spread of illness by taking regulatory action against the suspect products, or wastes (other than animal manures) that have the potential to contaminate the air, land, or waters used to produce the food product. The food product implicated in a foodborne outbreak determines which regulatory agency has primary jurisdiction: FSIS regulates meat, poultry, and egg products; FDA regulates all other foods including game meats, bottled drinking water and shell eggs; and EPA regulates water, drinking water from public systems, pesticides and manages organic and inorganic wastes used or disposed of on agricultural land. While each agency has clearly defined areas of responsibility, the successful containment of many outbreaks of foodborne illness involves more than one agency.

All states, and many local governments, with widely varying expertise and resources, share responsibility with the federal agencies for response to such outbreaks and, also, have a critical role. Identification and investigations of foodborne illness often begin at the community or state level. States share with the federal government the legal responsibility for protecting the health of their residents. The majority of foodborne outbreaks occur at the local or state level, however, many outbreaks involve federal agency jurisdiction. Illnesses cross state borders, and most foods or food ingredients are processed or produced in another state or by international trading partners. Federal involvement is also necessary when contaminated food from a common source has been distributed to grocery stores, restaurants, and homes in more than one state.

In many outbreaks of foodborne illness, federal agencies work with state and local health authorities in their investigation and in implementation of control measures through consultation, diagnostic assistance, and by regulatory action against the products. In some instances, on-site assistance is requested by local and state authorities from the CDC to establish the cause of an outbreak, and from other agencies to help find the source of the problem. For large or multistate outbreaks, federal agencies play a critical coordination role to ensure consistency of approach and implementation of needed control measures.

Companies responsible for affected products also have a critical role to play. Food companies are sometimes the first to recognize that their product is causing illness. In addition, food product recalls are voluntary, although FDA may request a company to recall products. Federal and state agencies can benefit from industry's expertise about food products and their distribution patterns.

C. Recognition of Need

Although significant coordination already occurs among the federal agencies; among federal, state and local agencies; among the various state agencies; and between state and local agencies, better coordination is needed to meet new and growing threats to the nation's food supply, enhance the level of public health protection, leverage agency resources and experience, and avoid duplication of effort and move more quickly since products can be widely distributed.

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Further, a critical element of an effective, rapid response to a foodborne illness outbreak is ready communication by all the involved parties. Although there are communication systems in place, the systems need to be expanded and coordinated to achieve rapid exchange of information and data between key outbreak response personnel in each agency at the federal, state and local levels.

The report to the President recommended the establishment of an intergovernmental group, to be known as the Foodborne Outbreak Response Coordinating Group, to improve the approach to interstate outbreaks of foodborne illness and develop a national coordinated outbreak response system.

II. PURPOSE

A. This memorandum of understanding ("Memorandum") among the parties is entered into in order to form the Foodborne Outbreak Response Coordinating Group ("FORCG").

B. The purpose of the FORCG is defined by the following goal, mission and objectives:

1. It is the goal of FORCG to improve the approach to interstate outbreaks of foodborne illness by federal, state and local agencies charged with responding to such outbreaks.
2. Toward this goal, it is the mission of FORCG to provide participation by federal, state and local agencies with outbreak response duties in the development of a national comprehensive and coordinated food borne illness outbreak response system.
3. This mission will be accomplished by subscribing to the following management objectives which will, in turn, guide FORCG:
 - a. FORCG will review and evaluate outbreak response at the federal agency level (among agencies), including cooperation among federal agencies and between state and local agencies and affected industries. FORCG will identify areas where efficiency can be gained and make specific recommendations for improvement. FORCG will work with federal, state, and local governments, the food industry, health professionals, and consumer advocates to implement beneficial changes.
 - b. The development of standard operating procedures for the rapid exchange of data and information associated with foodborne illness outbreaks between involved agencies and for dissemination to the public. The procedures will cover the exchange of data and information associated with an outbreak and will complement systems established for exchange of information about day-to-day occurrences of foodborne illness.

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c. A nationwide audit to catalogue existing state and local food safety program infrastructures.

d. The establishment of working groups to develop recommended procedures for outbreak response coordination at the state and local levels.

III. ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERSHIP

A. Under Title II, Section 204, Subpart (a) of the Unfunded Mandate Reform Act of 1995, Pub. L. 104-4, elected state officers, or their designated representatives with authority to act on their behalf, may meet with federal officers to exchange views, information, or advice relating to the management or implementation of federal programs established pursuant to public law that explicitly or inherently share intergovernmental responsibilities or administration. The parties therefore agree that all members of FORCG will be federal officials or state employees with the requisite authority.

B. FORCG will have the following members:

1. Two representatives from USDA: The Under Secretary for Food Safety and the Administrator for FSIS, or their designees.
2. Three representatives from HHS: The Assistant Secretary for Health, the Commissioner of the FDA and the Director of CDC, or their designees.
3. Two representatives from EPA: The Assistant Administrator for the Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances and the Assistant Administrator for Water, or their designees.
4. One representative from the Association of Food and Drug Officials.
5. One representative of National Association of City and County Health Officials.
6. One representative from the Association of State and Territorial Public Health Laboratory Directors.
7. One representative from the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists.
8. One representative from the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.
9. One representative from the Association of State Water Officials.

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IV. RESPONSIBILITIES AND SCOPE OF WORK

- A. FORCG will be co-chaired by the Under Secretary for Food Safety (USDA) and the Assistant Secretary for Health (HHS). His or her designee will facilitate each meeting.**
- B. One member will be designated as the outbreak coordinator for each department or agency that has a role in an outbreak response. HHS will designate the Assistant Secretary for Health as the primary person in charge of coordination for HHS. USDA will designate the Under Secretary for Food Safety as the primary person in charge of coordination for USDA. EPA will designate the Assistant Administrator for Water as the primary person in charge of coordination for EPA when drinking water is involved and the Assistant Administrator for the Office of Prevention, Pesticides, and Toxic Substances will be the primary person when Pesticides and Toxic Substances are involved.**

V. GENERAL PROVISIONS

- A. FORCG will meet monthly.**
- B. This Memorandum may be modified with supplemental written agreements signed by the parties and can be terminated in writing, in whole or in part, by consensus of the parties.**
- C. This Memorandum will become effective on the date the final signature is affixed hereto.**
- D. This Memorandum is entered into within the limits of the statutory authority of the parties to the Memorandum.**

SIGNATURES

Food Safety Event - May 22, 1998, Roosevelt Rm.

Name	Title	Organization
Scott J. Becker	Executive Director	Ass. of state and Territorial Public Health Laboratory
Cheryl Beversdorf	Executive Vice-President	Ass. Of State and Territorial Health Officials
Walter E. Juzenas	Public Health Policy Analyst	American Public Health Ass.
Jon Counts	State Laboratory Director	Washington Dept. Of Health
David Maserang	Chief, Bureau of Laboratory	Texas Dept. Of Health
Ralph Timperi	State Laboratory Director	Massachusetts Dept. Of Health
Richard S. Draut	Product Manager	Dynamic Resources Inc.
Robert S. Bolan	Consultant to IDSA Council	Infectious Diseases Society of America
Richard W. Kirchhoff		Nat'l Ass. Of State Dept. Of Agriculture
Carol Tucker Foreman	Coordinator	Safe Food Coalition
Robert Hahn	Director of Legal Affairs	Public Voice for Food and Health Policy
Mc Nair Bishop	VP Industry & Gov't Affairs	American Frozen Food Institute
Katherine A. Means	Vice President	Produce Marketing Association
Alan R. Tank	Chief Executive Officer	National Pork Producers Council
Sara Lilygren	Senior VP for Legislative & Public Affairs	American Meat Institute
Patrick Shin Atagi	Director of Gov't Affairs and Trade Policy	United Fresh Fruit & Veg. Ass.

Richard Lobb	Communications Director	National Broiler Council
Richard E. Gutting, Jr.	Executive VP	National Fisheries Institute
Stuart E. Richardson Jr.	Chief of Food and Drug Branch	California Dept. Of Health Services
Caroline Smith DeWaal	Director of Food Safety	Ctr for Science in the Public Interest
Linda Golodner	President	National Consumers League
Gary Weber	Regulatory Affairs Director	National Cattleman Ass.
Thomas L. Milne	Director	National Ass. Of City and County Health Officers
Virginia Nall Scott	Director of Food Safety Programs	National Food Processors Ass.
Thomas J. Billy		USDA Admin
Catherine E. Woteki		USDA Under Sec'y
I. Kaye Wachamuth		USDA
Andrew K. Moss		USDA
Joan Mondschein		USDA
Eric Olsen		USDA
Andy Soloman		USDA
Lynn R. Goldman		EPA Asst Admin Prev, Rest Tonic Sub
Robert Perciasepe		EPA
Michael Fernandez		EPA
Nancy J. Donley		Consumer Speaker
Dagmar Far	VP-Consumer Affairs	Food Marketing Affairs
Dale L. Morse	Director, Division of Infectious Disease	New York State Dept. Of Health, The Council of State & Territorial Epidemiologist
Cary Frye	VP- Scientific and Regulatory Affairs	Int'l Dairy Foods Ass.

Michael Friedman		FDA Lead Deputy
Sarukh Khambaty		FDA
LeeAnne Jackson		FDA
Claire Broome		CDC Acting Dir.
Balasubra Swaminathan		CDC
Susan Hunter		CDC
Mary Ann Lambert- Fair		CDC
James Hughes		CDC
Daniel Cameron		CDC
Timothy Barrett		CDC
Roger Hunter		CDC
Barbara Reynolds		CDC
Amy Linimon		CDC
Helen Fox Fields		CDC