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OA/ID Number: 13034
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Folder Title:
Imported Food Safety Initiative: [Correspondence] [4]

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**Q&A on the Safety of Imported Food
September 25, 1997**

Q: I have young children and I am worried about the safety of the food I buy for them. I am especially concerned about the stories I have read about the outbreaks of foodborne disease linked to imported food. Is food produced in the United States safer than imported food?

A: Both U.S. and foreign produced food are extremely safe. In fact, our nation's food supply today is probably the safest it has ever been, and we are working to make it even safer. During the last four and half years the Clinton Administration has taken a number of steps to further improve the safety of the food we eat. With the help of the Vice-President's National Performance Review, we have fundamentally enhanced the way we ensure the safety of meat, poultry, and seafood. We put in place important new protections against the risks of pesticides in our food, especially for our children. And Congress has recently agreed to provide most of the \$43 million the President requested to improve food safety and beginning next month we will be using that money to further reduce the incidence of foodborne illness.

In rare cases, however, food produced either here or abroad has caused an outbreak of foodborne illness. We are committed to taking additional steps to further ensure that all of our food is safe whether domestic or imported.

Q: It seems like we are hearing about more outbreaks of foodborne illness. Are we experiencing an increase in the number of outbreaks of foodborne disease?

A: Even though our food supply is among the safest in the world, each year there are still millions of Americans who get sick from the food they eat. The overwhelming majority of these cases are what is known as sporadic illnesses. These illnesses are individual cases not related to one another and are not caused by a single, specific contaminated food. An "outbreak" of foodborne disease is when many people become sick from being exposed to the same source of contaminated food.

As a result of new steps we have taken over the last four years, we are doing a more thorough job looking for outbreaks than we have ever done before. Experts we have consulted say that our improved surveillance is one of the primary reasons we are hearing about more food-related illnesses. We are catching and quickly responding to outbreaks of foodborne illness that we often missed in the past.

Q: We have heard the cautions about meat and poultry. We know we need to cook ground meat until it is well done, and we need to be careful not to cross-contaminate food. But many of the recent outbreaks have been associated with fresh fruits and vegetables. Is raw produce becoming more risky to eat?

A: There have been enormous changes in the produce department of the grocery store. Thirty years ago, most produce sections only had around a dozen items year round and that would increase to as many as 50 in the summer. Today, no matter where you live in the United States, the chances are there are 400 or more items in the produce section and they are there all year round. Ten years ago, Guatemala first began planting raspberries vines in their fields, today Guatemalan raspberries account for about 30 percent of the raspberries sold in U.S. stores.

We have changed as well. Americans are eating more fresh fruits and vegetables than ever before, and our nation's health experts tell us we will live longer, better quality lives as a result. Our environment is also changing. We are finding "new" exotic bugs such as cyclospora and *E. Coli O157:H7* on our food that once were not there.

When you add up all these changes, and ask the question: is raw produce more risky to eat, the experts have told us they don't think so. The increase in the amount of produce and the types of produce we consume is far greater than the illnesses that may have resulted. But the experts have also made suggestions on ways to further improve the safety of raw produce, and we are following their advice. The experts have also made recommendations to the public, such as making sure you wash raw produce before you consume it, and we are encouraging consumers to follow their advice as well.

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DRAFT**What Will Be The Followup To This Directive?**

USDA and FDA will report back to the President. Also, additional actions will be developed to build on this initiative. For example, in addition to farmers and food processors, we may need to develop action plans to address food safety concerns regarding transportation and handling of fruits and vegetables. We will also expand the FoodNet sentinel site program, and educational and outreach efforts to improve awareness of food safety at supermarkets, restaurants, and in homes.

Will Additional Legislation Be Needed?

Currently USDA and FDA are evaluating the need for additional legislation. Imports already must meet U.S. safety standards. What is needed most urgently are the resources to tackle this problem.

OPTIONAL FORM 10 (7-97)

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of pages - 1

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DRAFT

What exactly are Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices?

Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices are those which minimize the occurrence of foodborne disease by identifying points in the food production, delivery, and preparation process where harmful pathogens may be introduced. Many food producer and manufacturer groups have taken a leadership role in developing processes and procedures aimed at reducing these harmful pathogens in America's food supply. USDA and FDA will continue to support these industry efforts while working cooperatively with farmers and food manufacturers to develop better, quicker, and more accurate methods of preventing and ridding fresh fruits and vegetables of these adulterants.

Are Fruits and Vegetables Safe?

Fruits and vegetables certainly are safe and a key part of a healthful diet. Yet, recent occurrences of foodborne illness traceable to fruits and vegetables demand a redoubled effort to make America's food supply even safer. The difficulty is that food safety experts do not know exactly where or how the contamination occurs. It could be at any number of places between the growing and the consuming of food, including harvesting, transportation, packaging, distribution, retail display, and commercial or at-home preparation.

Are Imports Less Safe Than Domestic Product?

According to available data, we just don't know. However, this initiative is about making both domestic and imported product even safer. In cooperation with exporting countries, USDA and FDA will develop profiles of food production, transportation, and handling practices there. These profiles will give us information that we can use to target our inspection and testing resources to ensure that we are not importing unsafe food from those countries. It also will allow us to help exporting countries develop their own best practices for food safety.

Will This Initiative Require More Federal Resources?

USDA will ask for additional resources to expand the nationwide sampling program for pesticide residue on domestic and imported fruits and vegetables. It will be increased to include microbial pathogens such as E.coli. FDA will seek additional resources to test and inspect fruits and vegetables, including at country of origin.

Where Does Research Fit In?

We need more knowledge and tools to improve food safety. We don't know exactly how certain harmful pathogens show up in meat or on different fruits and vegetables. We need better, more rapid tests to identify these pathogens before they enter the retail food chain. And, we need to develop the methods and equipment to prevent this contamination from occurring.

A fundamental part of the Administration's 1998 initiative involved research. We need to accelerate food safety research in FY 98 and build on that effort in our FY 99 budget.

What will USDA's role be in supporting the new FDA guidelines (Good Manufacturing Practices and Good Agricultural Practice) for fresh fruit and vegetables?

USDA
only
Q's & A's

USDA's role will be threefold:

1. USDA will accelerate the research outlined in the FY98 President's Food Safety Initiative, to develop intervention technologies to eliminate and/or reduce levels of pathogens.
2. USDA and FDA will develop and deliver research-based educational programs to food producers, processors, handlers, and consumers and assist in providing guidance and procedures to reduce or eliminate contaminants.
3. USDA, FDA, and CDC will develop new assessment procedures for imported foods and provide technical assistance to existing countries to improve the safety of their products.

What will USDA's role be in outreach and education for farmers?

USDA's network of agencies and programs that operate on a grassroots level, provides an effective, efficient and farmer-friendly interface for the development, delivery, and ultimate evaluation of appropriate Best Agricultural Practices for specific commodities on a regional or localized basis. Appropriate USDA-supported agencies with extensive farmer outreach capabilities include, but are not limited to, Cooperative Extensions, the network of Agricultural Service Centers, county and regional Farm Service Agency offices and local conservation districts.

How could USDA assist in monitoring and testing domestic and imported fruit?

USDA could expand the scope of its nationwide, statistically valid pesticide residue monitoring program for domestic and imported fresh fruits and vegetables, the Pesticide Data Program (PDP), to develop a scientifically-sound microbiological surveillance program for foodborne pathogens and spoilage microflora on domestic and imported produce. (NOTE: This requires new funding and has not been approved.)

What additional actions will USDA take to build upon this Presidential Directive?

Today's directive builds on previous actions the Administration has taken to increase the safety of the nation's food supply. In addition, USDA will focus on a farm-to-table strategy to assess the risks of food contamination and to aid in the prevention of foodborne outbreaks for both domestically-produced and imported products.

Additional actions will build on the progress made in the 1998 Administration initiative. For example, our FY99 budget will continue our commitment to further expand the FoodNet sentinel

site program, expand our educational and outreach efforts to improve awareness of food safety at the farm, retail or restaurant level, and enhance research and risk assessment.

How will USDA monitor potential food safety problems in exporting countries? (Assessing agricultural production, transportation, and processing practices in these countries)

USDA will work with FDA, CDC, and the exporting countries to develop profiles of exporting countries and evaluate the food production, transportation, and handling practices. These profiles will provide information that will target our inspection and testing resources to ensure that food being shipped to the United States is safe.

How will USDA assist exporting countries to develop good agricultural practices?

USDA will encourage the adoption of good practices abroad through technical assistance, training, and cooperative research efforts.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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☐ JANET POTTS, COUNSEL TO THE SECRETARY

MESSAGE: This is broad Q & A on
Food Safety Generally. More to
come specifically on the initiative
in 20 weeks.

ENSURING THE SAFETY OF IMPORTED FOODS

Are Imported Foods Safe to Eat?

- At a time when the Congress is considering legislation that would renew presidential authority to negotiate trade agreements that would increase U.S. access to foreign agricultural markets, concerns about the safety of imported foods are being expressed.
- The food safety standards that apply to domestically produced foods also apply to imported foods. For example, the U.S. standards, or "tolerances," for permissible levels of pesticide residues in foods also apply to imported foods.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that, while foodborne illnesses associated with imported foods may be different than those associated with domestic products, the overall risks to consumers appear, in general, to be similar for both imported and domestic foods.
- The President's Food Safety Initiative announced earlier this year includes many activities to strengthen the programs already in place to help ensure the safety of both domestic and imported foods.

What Are The Benefits to the United States of Agricultural Trade?

- The U.S. economy benefits greatly from agricultural trade. Agriculture has consistently shown a trade surplus, every year since 1960. U.S. agricultural exports support almost 1 million jobs.
- Fruits and vegetables are an essential component of a healthy diet, and agricultural trade helps make available to Americans a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the year.

What Action is the U.S. Government Taking To Improve Food Safety?

- As announced last summer by President Clinton, surveillance and sentinel site activities designed to detect food-borne illness before it spreads are being enhanced as part of the Administration's Food Safety Initiative.
- The initiative includes the development of a new early warning system by Federal, State, and local governments to help detect outbreaks of food-borne illness earlier and allow the regulatory network to respond more quickly. Actions would include stopping shipments at the border and increasing the frequency of testing of imported meat and poultry products.
- The Food Safety Initiative includes risk assessment and research on better detection methods for foodborne pathogens and toxins.

SAFETY OF IMPORTED FOODS

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- U.S. food safety agencies continually gather and evaluate information from around the world on potential sources of food-borne illness to prevent entry of suspect foods into the United States.
- When this intelligence indicates a possible problem with an imported food from a given country, the Federal Government increases the monitoring of that food at border checkpoints and takes other action to prevent distribution of the food within the United States. When necessary, the Federal Government will work with the exporting country to address the underlying problems.
- The Federal Government maintains strong research and surveillance activities intended to identify emerging food-borne hazards.

What Are The Federal Government's Food Safety Programs with Regard To Imports?

- With regard to meat and poultry products specifically, the Federal inspection laws require countries that export meat or poultry to the United States to impose inspection requirements equivalent to U.S. requirements.
- Countries exporting meat or poultry to the United States undergo a rigorous review of their infrastructure and programs to gain eligibility to export meat or poultry to the United States.
- The United States evaluates a foreign country's controls on livestock and poultry slaughter and processing establishments in specific areas of risk: animal diseases, residues, contamination, food processing, economic fraud, and labeling.
- In July 1996, a final rule on pathogen reduction and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems for meat and poultry plants was published.
- In January 1997, the first two components of a new food safety system for meat and poultry became mandatory:

—All domestic meat and poultry plants and foreign meat and poultry plants exporting to the United States are required to adopt and follow written standard operating procedures (SOP) for sanitation to reduce the likelihood of harmful contamination or adulteration of products.

—All domestic and foreign meat and poultry slaughter plants that produce carcasses used in products exported to the United States will be required to conduct microbial testing for generic *E. coli*, to verify that controls on processing are working.

SAFETY OF IMPORTED FOODS

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- All domestic meat and poultry plants and those foreign meat and poultry plants exporting to the United States are required to implement HACCP by January 2000.
- In December 1995, the United States government published a final rule requiring HACCP programs at seafood processing plants. That requirement will go into effect on December 18, 1997. HACCP programs will be required at all domestic and foreign seafood processing plants shipping products into the United States.
- The United States regulatory agencies are working with their foreign counterparts to increase the number of international cooperative agreements. Under these agreements, regulatory agencies in each country ensure that food is produced and manufactured under equivalent systems that provide a comparable level of safety.
- U.S. laws require food agencies to go through a public notice and comment process before finding another country's system equivalent.

How Does The North America Free Trade Agreement Assure The Safety Of Our Food Supply?

- U.S. food safety officials hold leadership positions on committees of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).
- NAFTA did not change the requirement that imported foods comply with the same food safety standards as domestically produced food. Indeed the ability of countries to preserve safety requirements is explicitly protected.
- In fact, NAFTA provides a framework for increasing the likelihood that food produced in other countries meet U.S. standards.
- For example, under NAFTA, technical working groups have been established to address specific food safety issues, such as microbial contaminants, pesticides and chemical contaminants, for specific food groups such as fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and seafood.
- Through the technical working groups, the three countries share information about their pesticide regulatory systems and are working to coordinate the systems more closely.
- U. S. , Canadian, and Mexican officials work together along the borders to monitor food shipments and, if necessary, to stop suspect shipments. This cooperation has resulted in a decrease in the number of detentions of food shipments from Canada and Mexico.
- The United States, Canada, and Mexico have established a technical cooperative initiative to promote staff exchanges and the sharing of information among the three countries.

SAFETY OF IMPORTED FOODS

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- In the case of Mexico, the United States is providing information and technical assistance to the Mexican Government and groups of Mexican growers to help that country meet U.S. safety standards for foods intended for export to the United States.

How Will New Trade Agreements Assure The Safety Of Imported Foods?

- U.S. representatives have leadership positions in the international organizations charged with ensuring the safety of food produced around the world.
- U.S. food safety officials frequently meet with their counterparts in foreign governments to evaluate and discuss emerging food safety issues. The bilateral meetings take place routinely-- independent of any specific trade agreements or discussions--to develop programs to control microbiological and chemical contaminants in foods.
- The United States participates in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on food safety issues. The U.S. participation ensures that U.S. food safety standards are emphasized and not compromised in the interest of facilitating trade.
- The United States participates in all committees of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, an international food standard-setting forum created in 1962 under the sponsorship of the WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- U.S. participation in Codex ensures that the views of the United States on critical food safety issues will be addressed in the development of all international food standards.
- In summary, the U.S. government's international activities help to raise the global standards for food safety.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

SUBJECT: Initiative to Ensure the Safety of Imported Fruits and Vegetables

During my Administration, we have taken significant steps to strengthen our entire food safety system, including expanded research, education, and surveillance activities. We also have put into place enhanced safety standards relating particularly to meat, poultry, and seafood products. These measures are greatly improving the safety of the nation's food supply.

We need to build on these efforts, and today I ask you to do so by focusing on the safety of fruits and vegetables. Although the produce Americans eat is very safe, we can and must do even better, particularly with respect to produce imported from foreign countries. Last year, 38 percent of the fruit and 12 percent of the vegetables consumed by Americans came from overseas. We must ensure that these fruits and vegetables are produced under safety systems equivalent to those existing in the United States, at the same time that we upgrade our own domestic standards.

As you know, I am introducing legislation in Congress that will help accomplish this task. This legislation will authorize the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to halt imports of fruits, vegetables, or other food from any foreign country whose food safety systems and standards are not on par with those of the United States. This authority, which is equivalent to authority the USDA now has to halt the importation of meat and poultry, will enable the FDA to prevent the importation of potentially unsafe foreign produce. In addition, I will provide the necessary funds in my Fiscal Year 1999 budget to enable the FDA to expand dramatically its international inspection force. With this greatly increased ability to inspect food safety conditions abroad, the FDA will be able to determine when to halt the importation of fruits and vegetables from foreign countries.

At the same time, I direct you to take administrative actions that will better ensure the safety of fruits and vegetables coming from abroad, while continuing to improve the safety of domestic produce. You should accelerate whatever food safety research is necessary to support these actions.

First, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Secretary of Agriculture, to report back to me within 90 days with a plan on how to improve the use of existing and projected resources to monitor agricultural and manufacturing practices abroad, assist foreign countries to improve those practices, and prevent the importation of unsafe produce, including by detecting unsafe food at the dock or border. I especially urge you to consider the best ways to target inspection and testing resources toward those areas where problems are most likely to occur.

Second, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Secretary of Agriculture and in close cooperation with the agricultural community, to issue

within one year guidance on good agricultural practices and good manufacturing practices for fruits and vegetables. This guidance should address such matters as sanitation, worker health, and water use, should take into account differences in both crops and regions, and should address potential food safety problems throughout the food distribution and marketing system. By providing the first-ever specific safety standards for fruits and vegetables, the guidance will improve the agricultural and manufacturing practices of all those, foreign and domestic, seeking to sell produce in the U.S. market. To ensure that this guidance has the widest possible effect, I also direct the development of coordinated outreach and educational activities.

These steps, taken together and in coordination with the legislation I will send to Congress, will ensure to the fullest extent possible the safety of fruits and vegetables for all Americans. I will also direct the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Secretary of Labor to provide you with assistance in achieving this goal.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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MESSAGE: Ed's on Directive, 1 pager + new USDA Q+A.
I'll be in a mtg from 1-3 IF you need me, you can
call 720-7813. You should call Colleen Wobke 720-0350
or Joan Mendelsohn 720-4150 if you need assistance.

Thanks.

Also sending to FDA

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

SUBJECT: Initiative to ^{Improve} ~~Ensure~~ the Safety of Imported Fruits and Vegetables

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We need to build on these efforts, and today I ask you to do so by focusing on the safety of fruits and vegetables. Although the produce Americans eat is very safe, we can and must do even better, particularly with respect to produce imported from foreign countries. Last year, 38 percent of the fruit and 12 percent of the vegetables consumed by Americans came from overseas. We must ensure that these fruits and vegetables are produced under safety systems ^{as safe as} ~~equivalent to those existing in the United States, at the same time that we upgrade our own~~ ^{domestic standards.} ^{especially as}

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Food
products

~~and from our ports of entry, I suggest adding...~~ → need both

At the same time, I direct you to take administrative actions that will better ensure the safety of fruits and vegetables coming from abroad, while continuing to improve the safety of domestic produce. You should accelerate whatever food safety research is necessary to support these actions.

First, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, ^{and the} ~~in partnership with the~~ Secretary of Agriculture, to report back to me within 90 days with a plan on how to improve the use of existing and projected resources to monitor agricultural and manufacturing practices abroad, assist foreign countries to improve those practices, and prevent the importation of unsafe produce, including by detecting unsafe food at the dock or border. I especially urge you to consider the best ways to target inspection and testing resources toward those areas where problems are most likely to occur.

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These steps, taken together and in coordination with the legislation I will send to Congress, will ~~ensure to the fullest extent possible~~ the safety of fruits and vegetables for all Americans. I will also direct the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Secretary of Labor to provide you with assistance in achieving this goal.

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Initiative to Safeguard Imported Foods Summary of Initiative

The Clinton Administration proposes to increase assurances that all foods, from farm to table, and including imported foods, meet high standards of safety. As we recognize the increasing complexity of food systems, from domestic to international, from production to retail and food service, and the gaps in our knowledge about foodborne illness outbreaks, their causes and sources, we need to take the appropriate steps to maintain the safety of our food supply. Therefore, the Administration is proposing the following steps.

Guidance for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

FDA will develop "Guidance to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Risks for Fruits and Vegetables" in collaboration with USDA and with the food industry. This guidance will include ~~such issues as sanitation in harvesting and production facilities, transportation, water quality, and worker health and safety.~~ ^{be based on scientific knowledge of contamination throughout the food production and distribution system such as} FDA and USDA will convene a public meeting to discuss guidance concepts by mid-November 1997. Information from the public meetings will be used to publish this guidance for all fresh fruits and vegetables by January 1, 1998. Working with USDA and the food industry, FDA will publish good agricultural practices (GAPs) and good manufacturing practices (GMPs) guidance by the end of 1998 that will build on the broader guidance ~~and be further tailored to apply specifically to each of four to eight produce categories (representing a significant proportion of the fresh produce consumed annually in the United States).~~

Enhanced FDA Oversight Authority for Imported Foods

The Administration will propose legislation to enable FDA to ensure that no food may be imported into the United States unless it is produced under a system that provides the same level of public-health protection provided by the U.S. food-safety system. (USDA already has such authority for ensuring the safety of imported meat and poultry.) ~~In addition, legislation will be proposed that will allow FDA to refuse importation of a food that comes from a facility that refused to permit FDA inspection.~~ ^{where necessary,} ~~USDA and FDA will develop country profiles assessing the food production, transportation, and handling practices in place in foreign countries. USDA and FDA will also encourage the adoption of good practices overseas through technical assistance, training, and cooperative research efforts. The agencies will target these activities and assistance to suppliers of products being shipped to the United States.~~

New Resources to Oversee Imported Foods

The Administration will ask Congress to appropriate new funding, beginning in FY'99, to implement these initiatives. These funds will allow the federal agencies responsible for food safety to carry out such activities as hiring of new FDA inspectors to inspect foreign food producers and to inspect food imported into this country, ~~and to carry out research to develop methods to detect disease-causing pathogens in food,~~ ^{new personnel in coordination with international agencies, CAPD and organizations, FDA, CDC, and USDA} ~~and to improve our knowledge~~

and prevent

of pathogens on fruits and vegetables through statistically-designed sampling of domestic and imported products.

Report to the President

FDA and USDA will report back to the President by October 1, 1998, with a status report on progress toward the establishment of guidance to minimize microbial food-safety risks for fruits and vegetables, the legislation to enhance FDA's authority to keep unsafe foods out of the United States, and the testing, research, education, outreach and any other actions needed to implement this initiative. For example, this report will detail needs for better understanding of how food becomes contaminated--at every point in its production and distribution--and our needs for better scientific methods to more rapidly identify and eliminate pathogens from our food supply.

How does this track w/ 90 report in directive?

What will USDA's role be in developing and supporting the new FDA guidelines (Good Manufacturing Practices and Good Agricultural Practice) for fresh fruit and vegetables?

USDA will work in partnership with FDA and the agricultural community in developing the guidelines. USDA has a wide range of scientific and agricultural expertise in agencies like the extension service, the natural resource conservation service, and the agricultural research service, that will help to make the guidance as effective as possible.

In addition,

1. USDA will accelerate the research outlined in the FY98 President's Food Safety Initiative, to develop new technologies to more rapidly identify and eliminate or reduce levels of pathogens.
2. USDA and FDA will develop and deliver research-based educational programs to food producers, processors, handlers, and consumers and assist in providing guidance and procedures to reduce or eliminate contaminants.
3. USDA, FDA, and CDC will develop new assessment procedures for imported foods and provide technical assistance to existing countries where necessary to improve the safety of their products.

What will USDA's role be in outreach and education for farmers?

USDA's network of agencies and programs that operate on a grassroots level, provides an effective, efficient and farmer-friendly interface for the development, delivery, and ultimate evaluation of appropriate Best Agricultural Practices for specific commodities on a regional or localized basis. Appropriate USDA-supported agencies with extensive farmer outreach capabilities include, but are not limited to, Cooperative Extension, the network of Agricultural Service Centers, county and regional Farm Service Agency offices and local conservation districts.

How could USDA assist in monitoring and testing domestic and imported fruit?

USDA could expand the scope of its nationwide, statistically valid pesticide residue monitoring program for domestic and imported fresh fruits and vegetables, the Pesticide Data Program (PDP), to develop a scientifically-sound microbiological surveillance program for foodborne pathogens and spoilage microflora on domestic and imported produce. (NOTE: This requires new funding and has not been approved.)

What additional actions will USDA take to build upon this Presidential Directive?

Today's directive builds on previous actions the Administration has taken to increase the safety

of the nation's food supply. In addition, USDA will focus on a farm-to-table strategy to assess the risks of food contamination and to aid in the prevention of foodborne outbreaks for both domestically-produced and imported products.

Additional actions will build on the progress made in the 1998 Administration initiative. For example, our FY99 budget will continue our commitment to further expand the FoodNet sentinel site program, expand our educational and outreach efforts to improve awareness of food safety at the farm, retail or restaurant level, and enhance research and risk assessment.

How will USDA monitor potential food safety problems in exporting countries? (Assessing agricultural production, transportation, and processing practices in these countries)

USDA will work with FDA, CDC, and the exporting countries to develop profiles of exporting countries and evaluate the food production, transportation, and handling practices. These profiles will provide information that will target our inspection and testing resources to ensure that food being shipped to the United States is safe.

How will USDA assist exporting countries to develop good agricultural practices?

USDA will encourage the adoption of good practices abroad through technical assistance, training, and cooperative research efforts.

Food Imports and the IDB Background Paper

Issue:

Growing concerns are being expressed in the U.S. about possible outbreaks of disease linked to imported foods from Latin America and other developing countries. What efforts are underway at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to address this pressing problem?

Background.

Since 1968, the Inter-American Development Bank has financed 27 agricultural projects, totaling \$241 million, which included components for animal health in 19 countries in Latin America. A major accomplishment has been the eradication of hoof-and-mouth disease in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay as well as its prevention in Central America. In Haiti and the Dominican Republic, IDB programs have controlled and eradicated African swine fever.

Beginning in 1990, the IDB has financed programs in Latin America to support plant health. Areas of concentration have included control and eradication of the mediterranean fruitfly as well as the tristeza virus in citrus fruits.

Starting in 1997, the IDB began providing assistance to borrowing countries for the establishment of food safety control systems to comply with the WTO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary standards. The IDB is also considering requests from Guatemala and Honduras to help them set up Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), the new methodology established by the US FDA to ensure food safety.

Several examples of recently approved IDB projects are:

Peru. Agricultural Health Development Program (\$46 million). Activities include maintenance of a fruitfly-free areas in 25 fruit-growing valleys; training of fruit producers in comprehensive pest management; control and eradication of hoof-and-mouth disease; promotion of biological pest control to reduce costs and environmental damage; and control of scabies (affects wool production and quality in sheep and other cameloids).

Panama. Agricultural Services Modernization Program (\$34 million). Program aims at minimizing losses from pests and diseases and facilitating marketing. Activities include: establishment of laboratory to test for toxic residues in plant and animals; control of rabies and brucellosis; setting up of registry and analysis of pesticides; and establishment of livestock quarantine to prevent entry and spread of diseases.

INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

Washington, D.C. 20577

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
United States

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September 29, 1997

\$3.8M Seafood HACCP
State & Local
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① Is increased
trade going to
introduce risk.
Are proposal
goes a long way

U.S. Food-Safety System Swamped by Booming Global Imports (2)

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③ Does
Is our
proposal
really address
The
problem

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By JEFF GERTH and TIM WEINER

WASHINGTON -- Since the 1980s, food imports to the United States have doubled. But federal inspections of those imports by the Food and Drug Administration have dropped to less than half what they were five years ago.

Now, public-health scientists say they are seeing more and more outbreaks of disease linked to imported food, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables.

These are known to have sickened thousands of Americans, and those reported cases are a small fraction of the actual number of people made ill, according to scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

The scientists' list of outbreaks in the 1990s implicates imported foods -- including raspberries from Guatemala and carrots from Peru; strawberries, scallions and cantaloupes from Mexico; coconut milk from Thailand; canned mushrooms from China; an Israeli snack food, and a multinational batch of alfalfa sprouts -- in a variety of infectious diseases.

The increase in imports has strained the nation's food-safety system, said Dr. David Kessler, the Food and Drug Administration commissioner from 1990 through February 1997. "We built a system back 100 years ago that served us

very well for a world within our borders," he said in an interview. "We didn't build a system for the global marketplace."

Most of the food imported to the United States is wholesome. Millions of consumers, knowing that fresh produce is good for their health, now buy fruits and vegetables imported from around the world, regardless of the season, and without ill effect.

But the illnesses that have been imported along with some of the produce are an unintended byproduct of the boom in international trade -- a boom long advocated by the Reagan, Bush and Clinton administrations as crucial to economic growth.

There is "a tension between the two goals of safety and trade," said Mickey Kantor, President Clinton's first trade representative, who helped push global trade to the top of Clinton's agenda. "You want to open markets but not lower standards. And that's easy to say, but very, very difficult to carry out."

Scientists are recognizing that "free trade may present problems that are associated with food poisoning," said Dr. Marguerite Neill, an infectious disease specialist and a member of a federal advisory panel drafting new food-safety standards. These problems cut both ways: radish sprouts from Oregon seeds sickened people in Japan in March, and South Korea said it detected E. coli bacteria in a shipment of frozen U.S. beef last week.

The problems imports may pose for American consumers include polluted water used to grow food in Third-World nations, faulty safety systems in countries where the foods are produced, and a lack of natural immunity to exotic microbes rarely if ever seen in this country.

"Certain viruses, bacteria and parasites may be posing a unique problem in the U.S. because we haven't tended to be exposed to them," Dr. Neill said.

Dr. Yasmine Motarjemi, a World Health Organization food-safety scientist, said the organization also believed that global trade "brings new pathogens into countries which are not immune."

Those problems were foreseeable -- and foreseen.

In 1994, a Centers for Disease Control report said, "As trade and economic developments like Nafta take place, the globalization of food supplies is likely to have an increasing impact on foodborne illnesses."

In 1993, the Food and Drug Administration, in a memorandum citing "enormous inefficiencies in the current food-protection system" and the "ever-increasing challenges" posed by rapidly growing imports, asked the Clinton administration for legislation giving it power to bar all food -- including fruits, grains, vegetables and fish -- imported from any country with an inferior food-safety system.

The Department of Agriculture has such authority over imported meat and poultry. But the FDA never acquired that power through legislation or executive order.

Kessler said in an interview that he told the Bush and Clinton administrations that the safety system for imported food was inadequate and outdated.

"How is it physically possible to insure the safety of imported food?" he said. "You don't have police power throughout the world. Inspecting at the border has a limited value. You're left with real risks."

Now these risks figure in the political debate about free trade.

The Clinton administration wants the power to sign new free-trade pacts without Congress changing the language of those agreements. Opponents of this "fast-track" authority raise the food-safety flag. Some food growers say the risks from imports are insignificant, and that the CDC exaggerates them.

The CDC says diseases borne by domestic and foreign foods kill thousands of Americans and sicken millions, perhaps tens of millions, every year -- mostly the very young, the very old and the very ill. Its scientists say that almost none of those cases ever are traced back to their cause. As a result, they say, they lack the data to show how many people get sick from imported food, and whether that food is safer or less safe than domestic food.

Both sides in the "fast track" debate use the Centers for Disease Control's data to make their cases -- and both sides mischaracterize what the data show, according to the scientists.

Now the administration is preparing a proposal to address the problems posed by imported food -- nine months after announcing a sweeping food-safety initiative that largely ignored them, and days after a bill to revamp the Food and Drug Administration was passed by the Senate.

The Food Chain: Modern-Day Travels Of Tainted Products

The United States has its own food-safety problems at home. Urgent questions about the integrity of America's food supply were raised when three American children died and 144 people were hospitalized after eating fast-food hamburgers in 1993. A reminder of the problem came this summer, when tainted hamburger meat from a Nebraska plant made 16 people sick.

But this spring and last, in an outbreak that attracted less attention, tainted raspberries from Guatemala made thousands of Americans sick. They were victims of a nearly invisible, dimly understood parasite called cyclospora, a species almost never seen in the United States before 1996.

To know the story of raspberries and cyclospora, Dr. Michael Osterholm, one of the nation's leading epidemiologists, wrote recently, "is to know food-borne disease in the modern world."

Not a single raspberry grew in Guatemala a decade ago. They grow today because the United States helped introduce them.

In the 1980s, during the height of the Guatemalan army's campaign against leftist guerrillas, the U.S. Agency for International Development tried to win over the peasants by introducing them to the riches of global trade. Spurred by the Reagan administration's Caribbean Basin Initiative, a 1983 free-trade measure that cut or eliminated tariffs on imports, the agency spent tens of millions of dollars promoting "nontraditional" agriculture in Guatemala.

It persuaded rural Guatemalans to switch from planting corn and beans for themselves to growing exotic crops for North Americans. It financed Guatemalan exporters and American importers who bring raspberries and other produce to the United States.

The raspberry trade exploded two years ago. Guatemala shipped less than 4,000 pounds of raspberries to the United States in 1992 -- and about 700,000 pounds in 1996. The growers timed their first harvest of 1996 for late April and early May, when they would have the U.S. market almost completely to themselves.

But, every April and May, when the spring rains come to the highlands, thousands of Guatemalans fall ill. They think something in the water flowing from the mountains makes them sick. And when the raspberries came to the United States in spring 1996, thousands of Americans fell ill as well. Many experienced weeks of misery -- debilitating diarrhea, severe cramps, chills, fever, nausea, weight loss, depression.

The Centers for Disease Control's scientists never found cyclospora on the raspberries, but they found it in the stools of the American who ate them. And they are fairly certain that the parasite lay hiding in the water in Guatemala -- the water with which the berries were sprayed and irrigated just before they were picked, shipped and eaten fresh and raw days later in the United States.

The case underscores the CDC's recent warning that "improving the microbiological safety of drinking water and food production" overseas is crucial "to insure the safety of the increasing amounts of food imported to the United States."

After that experience, American scientists and Guatemalan growers, working together, did everything they could to prevent another outbreak. But when this spring came, it happened again: Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Americans who ate Guatemalan raspberries fell sick.

The cyclospora case is now the biggest outbreak of food-borne disease in the United States in years. The Centers for Disease Control counts at least 2,300 people sickened this year and last. They are "the tip of the iceberg, and we don't know how big the iceberg is," said Dr. Barbara Herwaldt of the CDC. The Centers for Disease Control still know little about the parasite. But they established this spring that cyclospora is a common cause of diarrhea in

Guatemalan children, and is still present in the water that runs through the highlands. It has shown that a polluted stream in a Third World field can spawn a mysterious bug that can sicken a diner in midtown Manhattan.

"We eat out of everybody else's garden now," said Dr. Dan Colley, director of the Centers for Disease Control's division of parasitic diseases. And on an increasingly crowded planet, not everyone's garden is well-kept.

When cyclospora struck in the United States again this spring, Guatemalan berry growers acted swiftly. First, they voluntarily suspended their shipments. Then they kicked the CDC's field investigator off their farms. Then they denounced the American scientists as snipers fighting a trade war on behalf of the growers' California competitors.

Roberto Castenada, vice president of the Guatemalan Berries Commission, said in an interview: "Last year the guerrillas were in the fields asking my workers about their conditions, asking, 'Do you have bathrooms?' And this year, it was the CDC. The CDC is killing us. They kill us every time they open their mouths."

Gabriel Biguria, a former president of Gexpront, the Guatemalan agricultural export group, said that his country was the victim of an unfair trade practice.

"Cyclospora?" he said. "They can't find it. We find a tremendous possibility that people in California are using this as a very dangerous tool for protectionism. Protectionist forces find bugs or whatever to protect their market. It's a commercial war."

This dispute illustrates how science and politics collide in the arena of trade.

Some of the biggest food-trade fights have centered on the safety of American products. European nations did not want hormone-injected beef or chlorine-rinsed chicken. So far, the United States has won those cases. But now the United States sometimes finds itself on the other side of the fence, fighting with trading partners about the safety standards for their imports.

"Where we see a safety issue, they see a trade issue," said Dr. I. Kaye Wachsmuth, a leading federal food-safety official.

The Inspectors: Import-Ban Power for the F.D.A.

Things were simpler when most of the food Americans ate was grown near their homes. Traditionally, food illness came from under-cooked or mishandled domestic meat and poultry. Today, people depend more on global trade to satisfy their hunger.

"Go to a restaurant and take a look at your supper," said Dr. Robert Tauxe, chief of the food-borne and diarrheal disease branch at the Centers for Disease Control. "How many different continents are on your plate?"

The food chain that fills those plates has become unimaginably intricate.

For example, alfalfa sprouts gave salmonella to hundreds of people in 24 states this year and last. The seeds for those sprouts were bought from Uganda and Pakistan, among other nations, shipped through Holland, flown into New York and trucked around the United States, Tauxe said.

Previously unknown pathogens are being discovered years after they arrive in the United States. Take the case of the Peruvian carrots, which took years to break.

In a forthcoming issue of the Journal of Infectious Diseases, Osterholm and his colleagues will report their discovery of a new strain of E. coli bacteria, linked to a shipment of carrots from Peru. It took them six years to connect the new strain to a 1991 outbreak at a Minneapolis convention.

Most of the data on food-borne disease come from a relatively small number of outbreaks at big gatherings -- conventions, restaurants and receptions. Most cases are never reported at all, said Osterholm, Minnesota's chief epidemiologist.

"If you get an outbreak of 500 people in a state, but no more than a few in any one household, you'll never pick it up," he said.

Because one percent or less of the actual number of outbreaks are reported, analyzed, identified, and successfully traced back to the source, the CDC says, its scientists cannot identify the causes of the great majority of food-borne diseases.

International food-borne outbreaks, said Colley of the Centers for Disease Control, are increasing and "can be expected to worsen as the world moves toward a global food economy."

Detecting microbes at the border is about as effective as detecting illegal drugs.

The Food and Drug Administration's inspectors test an ever-dwindling fraction of the 30 billion tons of food now imported into the United States. The responsibilities of individual inspectors have increased, but their resources have dwindled. They sampled 17,000 food items in 1996, less than one percent of 2.2 million food shipments, down from 30,000 samples, or about 3 percent of 1.1 million shipments, in 1992.

A more fundamental defense -- insuring the safety of food at its source -- does not exist. The FDA's inspectors can seize suspect imports, but they lack the power to automatically bar imported food just because it comes from a foreign country with an inferior food-safety system.

Congress has never granted them that power. The White House has never publicly asked for it -- until now, as it seeks "fast track" authority for trade pacts that is being seriously challenged in Congress over food-safety issues. The

administration plans to announce a proposal seeking to give the Food and Drug Administration the new powers this week.

The need has been apparent for years, federal food-safety officials said. They cited the case of the tainted coconut milk from Thailand. In 1991, frozen coconut milk processed at a Bangkok plant, and exported by a Thai trading company to the United States, set off an outbreak of cholera. The life-threatening disease was thought to have been eradicated in this country.

"The Thai authorities were unaware of the existence of the plant," said Tauxe of the Centers for Disease Control. "It was unlicensed, uninspected, unregulated."

Nor is it clear that the new powers the White House is planning to seek would have prevented the outbreak.

"I can't imagine an FDA inspector in every country overseas," said Peggy Foegeding, a principal author of a landmark 1994 study on food-borne pathogens.

The United States is second to none at stopping food-borne disease after it breaks out. The Clinton administration says it will lift up public-health and food-safety standards around the world until they meet those of the United States, in order to insure the safety of imported food.

But the United States' public-health systems today "cannot properly identify, track, and control food-related illness, or prevent, to the extent possible, future cases from occurring," said a federal report published in May as part of a food-safety initiative now nearing passage in Congress.

The Safety Net: Eroding Resources For Surveillance

Some federal agencies are helping their foreign counterparts improve their public health systems. But "the United States cannot really build public health structures for the world," said Kerri-Ann Jones, a top White House science official.

The Clinton administration says it wants more surveillance, more research, more FDA inspectors. But "federal budget constraints will likely prohibit significant funding increases in the future" for the FDA, said the food-safety initiative report published in May.

Many state health departments are overburdened and underfinanced, in part because of the AIDS crisis. Twelve states have no system for reporting food-borne disease, largely because of budget restrictions, public health officials say.

And many countries are reducing their own disease-surveillance capabilities. "Economic globalization has also increased the need for governmental budget austerity," and countries around the world are cutting spending on public health to streamline their economies, according to a forthcoming study by World

Health Organization officials.

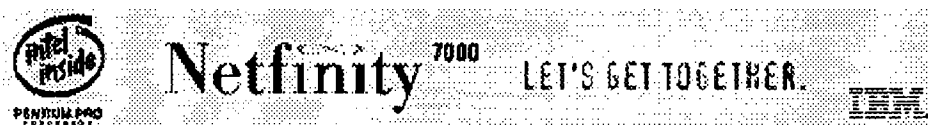
Scientists have fought new diseases spread by trade, travel and technology before. One night in 1849, a British doctor, John Snow, had a brainstorm. Having realized that cholera was spread by contaminated water, he ripped the handle off a water pump in a London slum and stopped an epidemic.

Global trade, the gigantic pump bringing the essentials and luxuries of life, and the small but rising threat of disease, poses more intricate challenges for scientists.

Kessler and other prominent scientists, while acknowledging the problems with domestic food, said those challenges can be summarized by two questions:

As the world's nations become more intertwined, interdependent and intensely competitive, will the rest of the world's standards become more like those of the United States, with its relatively safe water, sound hygiene and state-of-the-art science? Will the United States, despite its high standards, become more vulnerable to the rest of the world's microbes?

"The challenge for the United States," Kessler said, "is to raise everyone else's standards."



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Q&A on the Safety of Imported Food
September 25, 1997

To: Karen
Bill
FM: JRM 456-6018

Q: I have young children and I am worried about the safety of the food I buy for them. I am especially concerned about the stories I have read about the outbreaks of foodborne disease linked to imported food. Is food produced in the United States safer than imported food?

A: Both U.S. and foreign produced food are extremely safe. In fact, our nation's food supply today is probably the safest it has ever been, and we are working to make it even safer. During the last four and half years the Clinton Administration has taken a number of steps to further improve the safety of the food we eat. With the help of the Vice-President's National Performance Review, we have fundamentally enhanced the way we ensure the safety of meat, poultry, and seafood. We put in place important new protections against the risks of pesticides in our food, especially for our children. And Congress has recently agreed to provide most of the \$43 million the President requested to improve food safety and beginning next month we will be using that money to further reduce the incidence of foodborne illness.

In rare cases, however, food produced either here or abroad has caused an outbreak of foodborne illness. We are committed to taking additional steps to further ensure that all of our food is safe whether domestic or imported.

Q: It seems like we are hearing about more outbreaks of foodborne illness. Are we experiencing an increase in the number of outbreaks of foodborne disease?

A: Even though our food supply is among the safest in the world, each year there are still millions of Americans who get sick from the food they eat. The overwhelming majority of these cases are what is known as sporadic illnesses. These illnesses are individual cases not related to one another and are not caused by a single, specific contaminated food. An "outbreak" of foodborne disease is when many people become sick from being exposed to the same source of contaminated food.

As a result of new steps we have taken over the last four years, we are doing a more thorough job looking for outbreaks than we have ever done before. Experts we have consulted say that our improved surveillance is one of the primary reasons we are hearing about more food-related illnesses. We are catching and quickly responding to outbreaks of foodborne illness that we often missed in the past.

Q: We have heard the cautions about meat and poultry. We know we need to cook ground meat until it is well done, and we need to be careful not to cross-contaminate food. But many of the recent outbreaks have been associated with fresh fruits and vegetables. Is raw produce becoming more risky to eat?

A: There have been enormous changes in the produce department of the grocery store. Thirty years ago, most produce sections only had around a dozen items year round and that would increase to as many as 50 in the summer. Today, no matter where you live in the United States, the chances are there are 400 or more items in the produce section and they are there all year round. Ten years ago, Guatemala first began planting raspberries vines in their fields, today Guatemalan raspberries account for about 30 percent of the raspberries sold in U.S. stores.

We have changed as well. Americans are eating more fresh fruits and vegetables than ever before, and our nation's health experts tell us we will live longer, better quality lives as a result. Our environment is also changing. We are finding "new" exotic bugs such as cyclospora and *E. Coli O157:H7* on our food that once were not there.

When you add up all these changes, and ask the question: is raw produce more risky to eat, the experts have told us they don't think so. The increase in the amount of produce and the types of produce we consume is far greater than the illnesses that may have resulted. But the experts have also made suggestions on ways to further improve the safety of raw produce, and we are following their advice. The experts have also made recommendations to the public, such as making sure you wash raw produce before you consume it, and we are encouraging consumers to follow their advice as well.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 24, 1997

MEMORANDUM FOR ERSKINE BOWLES

FROM: Bruce Reed
Elcna Kagan

SUBJECT: Food Safety Initiative

This memorandum sets out a proposal for a new food safety initiative focusing on imported produce. HHS/FDA, USDA, USTR, and OMB have participated in developing this proposal. The memorandum also raises an issue of timing that has arisen in our policy discussions.

The Proposal

The initiative has four elements -- one administrative and three legislative.

1. A Presidential directive to the FDA to issue guidance on good agricultural practices and good manufacturing practices for fruits and vegetables. This guidance would deal with such matters as sanitation, worker health, and water use. The guidance would not itself have the force of law (the domestic farmers' groups would object if it did), but would indicate what kinds of practices the FDA believes violate the Food and Drug Act. In so doing, the guidance (we may be able to use the term "enforcement standards") would improve the agricultural and manufacturing practices of all those, foreign and domestic, seeking to sell produce in the U.S. market. As part of this directive, the President would instruct USDA to provide assistance to the FDA through various research activities and educational programs.

2. Proposed legislation giving the FDA authority to bar food imports from any foreign country or establishment that does not provide safety protections that are at least equivalent to those provided by the U.S. food safety system. This legislation would give to the FDA the power now held by USDA (regarding meat and poultry products) to hold foreign countries and establishments to an "equivalency standard." We expect that Jeff Gerth will highlight this difference between USDA and FDA authority, noting that the FDA now relies on essentially unenforceable bilateral agreements to hold other countries to equivalent food safety standards. The legislation would include the authority to bar imports if a foreign country or establishment refused to permit the FDA to carry out inspections.

3. Proposed legislation and budget request to improve and expand the FDA's inspection system, particularly in relation to foreign producers. OMB is still reviewing the numbers, but the FDA has requested \$20-25 million for FY 99. This appropriation would allow vastly increased

inspections abroad and at the dock (though still permitting the inspection of only a minuscule percentage of total imports), as well as some supportive research activities. Some fairly significant funding commitment to hire additional inspectors is critical to the credibility of this initiative.

4. Proposed legislation to require "country of origin" labeling on produce, meat and certain other food products. This legislation would not itself do much to improve food safety (at least in the short term), but it would provide consumers with more complete information than they currently have about food products. It also may be the part of this package that the public finds most attractive. The agricultural groups are divided on the desirability of such legislation. The Farmers Union and Farmers Bureau like it, as do the cattlemen and most fruit and vegetable growers. Pork producers do not like it (we don't know why), and food processors and retailers think the legislation would place onerous burdens on them.

Timing

Some believe we should not announce this initiative immediately. OMB (OIRA) urges that we take more time to vet the proposal, noting that it is complex and politically sensitive -- and that we have put it together from scratch in 48 hours. OMB also has asked whether we should use these proposals during negotiations over fast track (to buy the support of reluctant legislators), rather than announce them now. Finally, USTR has expressed some uncertainty about whether the "country of origin" proposal in particular could undermine, rather than aid, our position on fast track. (USTR stresses that this is a question only of political strategy; USTR has no objections to any part of this package as a matter of trade policy.)



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 - ☐ JANET POTTS, COUNSEL TO THE SECRETARY

MESSAGE: This is broad Q+A on
Food Safety Generally. More to
come specifically on the initiative
in 20 mins.

ENSURING THE SAFETY OF IMPORTED FOODS

Are Imported Foods Safe to Eat?

- At a time when the Congress is considering legislation that would renew presidential authority to negotiate trade agreements that would increase U.S. access to foreign agricultural markets, concerns about the safety of imported foods are being expressed.
- The food safety standards that apply to domestically produced foods also apply to imported foods. For example, the U.S. standards, or "tolerances," for permissible levels of pesticide residues in foods also apply to imported foods.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that, while foodborne illnesses associated with imported foods may be different than those associated with domestic products, the overall risks to consumers appear, in general, to be similar for both imported and domestic foods.
- The President's Food Safety Initiative announced earlier this year includes many activities to strengthen the programs already in place to help ensure the safety of both domestic and imported foods.

What Are The Benefits to the United States of Agricultural Trade?

- The U.S. economy benefits greatly from agricultural trade. Agriculture has consistently shown a trade surplus, every year since 1960. U.S. agricultural exports support almost 1 million jobs.
- Fruits and vegetables are an essential component of a healthy diet, and agricultural trade helps make available to Americans a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the year.

What Action is the U.S. Government Taking To Improve Food Safety?

- As announced last summer by President Clinton, surveillance and sentinel site activities designed to detect food-borne illness before it spreads are being enhanced as part of the Administration's Food Safety Initiative.
- The initiative includes the development of a new early warning system by Federal, State, and local governments to help detect outbreaks of food-borne illness earlier and allow the regulatory network to respond more quickly. Actions would include stopping shipments at the border and increasing the frequency of testing of imported meat and poultry products.
- The Food Safety Initiative includes risk assessment and research on better detection methods for foodborne pathogens and toxins.

- U.S. food safety agencies continually gather and evaluate information from around the world on potential sources of food-borne illness to prevent entry of suspect foods into the United States.
- When this intelligence indicates a possible problem with an imported food from a given country, the Federal Government increases the monitoring of that food at border checkpoints and takes other action to prevent distribution of the food within the United States. When necessary, the Federal Government will work with the exporting country to address the underlying problems.
- The Federal Government maintains strong research and surveillance activities intended to identify emerging food-borne hazards.

What Are The Federal Government's Food Safety Programs with Regard To Imports?

- With regard to meat and poultry products specifically, the Federal inspection laws require countries that export meat or poultry to the United States to impose inspection requirements equivalent to U.S. requirements.
- Countries exporting meat or poultry to the United States undergo a rigorous review of their infrastructure and programs to gain eligibility to export meat or poultry to the United States.
- The United States evaluates a foreign country's controls on livestock and poultry slaughter and processing establishments in specific areas of risk: animal diseases, residues, contamination, food processing, economic fraud, and labeling.
- In July 1996, a final rule on pathogen reduction and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems for meat and poultry plants was published.
- In January 1997, the first two components of a new food safety system for meat and poultry became mandatory:

--All domestic meat and poultry plants and foreign meat and poultry plants exporting to the United States are required to adopt and follow written standard operating procedures (SOP) for sanitation to reduce the likelihood of harmful contamination or adulteration of products.

--All domestic and foreign meat and poultry slaughter plants that produce carcasses used in products exported to the United States will be required to conduct microbial testing for generic *E. coli*, to verify that controls on processing are working.

- All domestic meat and poultry plants and those foreign meat and poultry plants exporting to the United States are required to implement HACCP by January 2000.
- In December 1995, the United States government published a final rule requiring HACCP programs at seafood processing plants. That requirement will go into effect on December 18, 1997. HACCP programs will be required at all domestic and foreign seafood processing plants shipping products into the United States.
- The United States regulatory agencies are working with their foreign counterparts to increase the number of international cooperative agreements. Under these agreements, regulatory agencies in each country ensure that food is produced and manufactured under equivalent systems that provide a comparable level of safety.
- U.S. laws require food agencies to go through a public notice and comment process before finding another country's system equivalent.

How Does The North America Free Trade Agreement Assure The Safety Of Our Food Supply?

- U.S. food safety officials hold leadership positions on committees of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).
- NAFTA did not change the requirement that imported foods comply with the same food safety standards as domestically produced food. Indeed the ability of countries to preserve safety requirements is explicitly protected.
- In fact, NAFTA provides a framework for increasing the likelihood that food produced in other countries meet U.S. standards.
- For example, under NAFTA, technical working groups have been established to address specific food safety issues, such as microbial contaminants, pesticides and chemical contaminants, for specific food groups such as fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and seafood.
- Through the technical working groups, the three countries share information about their pesticide regulatory systems and are working to coordinate the systems more closely.
- U. S. , Canadian, and Mexican officials work together along the borders to monitor food shipments and, if necessary, to stop suspect shipments. This cooperation has resulted in a decrease in the number of detentions of food shipments from Canada and Mexico.
- The United States, Canada, and Mexico have established a technical cooperative initiative to promote staff exchanges and the sharing of information among the three countries.

- In the case of Mexico, the United States is providing information and technical assistance to the Mexican Government and groups of Mexican growers to help that country meet U.S. safety standards for foods intended for export to the United States.

How Will New Trade Agreements Assure The Safety Of Imported Foods?

- U.S. representatives have leadership positions in the international organizations charged with ensuring the safety of food produced around the world.
- U.S. food safety officials frequently meet with their counterparts in foreign governments to evaluate and discuss emerging food safety issues. The bilateral meetings take place routinely-- independent of any specific trade agreements or discussions--to develop programs to control microbiological and chemical contaminants in foods.
- The United States participates in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on food safety issues. The U.S. participation ensures that U.S. food safety standards are emphasized and not compromised in the interest of facilitating trade.
- The United States participates in all committees of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, an international food standard-setting forum created in 1962 under the sponsorship of the WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- U.S. participation in Codex ensures that the views of the United States on critical food safety issues will be addressed in the development of all international food standards.
- In summary, the U.S. government's international activities help to raise the global standards for food safety.

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What Will Be The Followup To This Directive?

USDA and FDA will report back to the President. Also, additional actions will be developed to build on this initiative. For example, in addition to farmers and food processors, we may need to develop action plans to address food safety concerns regarding transportation and handling of fruits and vegetables. We will also expand the FoodNet sentinel site program, and educational and outreach efforts to improve awareness of food safety at supermarkets, restaurants, and in homes.

Will Additional Legislation Be Needed?

Currently USDA and FDA are evaluating the need for additional legislation. Imports already must meet U.S. safety standards. What is needed most urgently are the resources to tackle this problem.

OPTIONAL FORM 99 (7-93)

FAX TRANSMITTAL

of pages = 1

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5099-101

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

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What exactly are Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices?

Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices are those which minimize the occurrence of foodborne disease by identifying points in the food production, delivery, and preparation process where harmful pathogens may be introduced. Many food producer and manufacturer groups have taken a leadership role in developing processes and procedures aimed at reducing these harmful pathogens in America's food supply. USDA and FDA will continue to support these industry efforts while working cooperatively with farmers and food manufacturers to develop better, quicker, and more accurate methods of preventing and ridding fresh fruits and vegetables of these adulterants.

Are Fruits and Vegetables Safe?

Fruits and vegetables certainly are safe and a key part of a healthful diet. Yet, recent occurrences of foodborne illness traceable to fruits and vegetables demand a redoubled effort to make America's food supply even safer. The difficulty is that food safety experts do not know exactly where or how the contamination occurs. It could be at any number of places between the growing and the consuming of food, including harvesting, transportation, packaging, distribution, retail display, and commercial or at-home preparation.

Are Imports Less Safe Than Domestic Product?

According to available data, we just don't know. However, this initiative is about making both domestic and imported product even safer. In cooperation with exporting countries, USDA and FDA will develop profiles of food production, transportation, and handling practices there. These profiles will give us information that we can use to target our inspection and testing resources to ensure that we are not importing unsafe food from those countries. It also will allow us to help exporting countries develop their own best practices for food safety.

Will This Initiative Require More Federal Resources?

USDA will ask for additional resources to expand the nationwide sampling program for pesticide residue on domestic and imported fruits and vegetables. It will be increased to include microbial pathogens such as E.coli. FDA will seek additional resources to test and inspect fruits and vegetables, including at country of origin.

Where Does Research Fit In?

We need more knowledge and tools to improve food safety. We don't know exactly how certain harmful pathogens show up in meat or on different fruits and vegetables. We need better, more rapid tests to identify these pathogens before they enter the retail food chain. And, we need to develop the methods and equipment to prevent this contamination from occurring.

A fundamental part of the Administration's 1998 initiative involved research. We need to accelerate food safety research in FY 98 and build on that effort in our FY 99 budget.

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Americans enjoy a wide variety of safe and wholesome foods produced both domestically and abroad. During my Administration, we have taken significant steps to improve the safety of our meat, poultry, and seafood products as well as strengthening our entire food safety system, including expanded food safety research, education, and surveillance to improve our ability to stop food borne illnesses from spreading.

We need to build on these efforts. Americans are eating more fruits and vegetables, which are a key part of a healthful diet. While most are produced domestically by our farmers and agriculture industry, we are also importing more fruits and vegetables from other countries. Both domestic and imported fruits and vegetables are safe, but we need to take additional measures to make them even safer for American consumers.

I am therefore directing you to immediately implement the following actions. First, to improve our monitoring system of food produced abroad, you must enhance your evaluations of the agricultural practices of exporting countries to determine where potential food safety problems may occur and to assist those countries in implementing measures to address these potential problems. Second, to ensure that no unsafe food enters the United States, our food safety inspection and testing program for imports must be expanded and targeted at those areas where food safety problems are likely to occur.

Third, to improve the safety of domestically produced fruits and vegetables, you must work cooperatively with the agricultural community to identify the best practices that can be adopted to prevent food safety problems. The private sector has taken a leadership role in beginning to develop these practices, which must take into account the differences in crops and regions to be most effective, and I expect that you will work with them to build upon these efforts. While many are already using these practices, you also need to work with the agricultural industry to develop and implement a grass-roots outreach and education program to encourage their adoption across the country.

Fourth, we need additional knowledge and tools to further improve food safety. You must accelerate your food safety research and education initiatives to improve our understanding of how food can become contaminated at every point in its production and distribution. We also need better scientific tests and procedures to more rapidly identify and eliminate dangerous pathogens from our food supply, both domestic and imported.

Finally, I am directing you to report back within thirty days with your recommendations for additional actions and investments that must be taken to ensure the effectiveness of this effort as well as continuing to build on the critical elements of this Administration's 1998 food safety initiative.