

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Orlando, Florida)

Egg Safety

For Immediate Release

December 11, 1999

RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE NATION

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. The holidays are upon us, and across our nation families and friends are gathering to celebrate the season. Today, I want to talk about the steps we must take to make sure the food at these festivities - indeed, the food we serve every day - is the safest in the world.

For seven years now, our administration has worked hard to strengthen our food safety standards for the 21st century. We've made significant strides by using the newest research and best technology available. We're using new, science-based standards for meat, poultry and seafood. We've updated our standards for fruit and vegetable juices. We also established a nationwide early-warning system for food-borne illness to catch problems sooner and prevent them from happening in the first place. We're making new advances each year, and are committed to moving forward on all fronts.

But the holiday season is only our latest reminder. When it comes to what we feed our families, there's really no such thing as "too safe." We know certain foods carry a special risk for children, for the elderly, for those with weakened immune systems. My Council on Food Safety has identified eggs as one of those foods. Every year, about 3.3 million eggs are infected with salmonella bacteria. This causes about 300,000 cases of illness. And when infected eggs still make it from the farm to the table, we know we have more work to do.

That's why today I am taking new action on food safety to cut in half, over the next five years, the number of salmonella cases attributed to eggs. And our goal is to eliminate these cases entirely by 2010. This aggressive action plan permits egg producers and processors to choose between two strategies of safety. The first happens at the farm, where extensive tests and rigorous practices will help prevent infected eggs from ever reaching your local grocery. The second happens at the packing plant, where new technologies like in-shell pasteurization will help keep eggs safe and free of bacteria.

I'm also announcing new steps to keep unsafe food imports outside our borders, and out of our marketplace. We Americans are eating more imported food than ever, more than double the amount we consumed just seven years ago. It used to be that only a dozen fruits and vegetables were available year-round. Now, it's common to find as many as 400 varieties, whether in the heat of summer or the chill of winter.

Now, we have no reason to believe imported food is any less safe than the food we grow at home. But after several outbreaks of illnesses were traced to imported foods, I directed the Department of Treasury and the Department of Health and Human Services to take action against unsafe imported food, and to better protect our consumers. Today they're responding with a comprehensive plan. It sets forth steps to prevent so-called "port shopping," so unsafe food stopped at one port can't find another way into our country. Customs and the FDA will also stamp rejected food with a clear label - "The United States Refused" - and step up our policy of destroying imported food that poses a serious threat to people's health.

Food safety is part of our citizens' basic contract with the government. Any food that fails to meet clear and strict standards for safety should not make it to the marketplace; it's just that simple. With the actions we're taking today, our families can have the peace of mind they deserve every holiday season, and indeed, every day of the year.

Thanks for listening.

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