

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**Food Safety and Inspection Service**

[Docket No. 98-045N]

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention****Food and Drug Administration**

[Docket No. 97N-0074]

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

[Docket No. OPP-00550; FRL-6019-9]

President's National Food Safety Initiative

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA; Research, Education, and Economics, USDA; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HHS; Food and Drug Administration, HHS; Environmental Protection Agency.

ACTION: Notice: public meeting; establishment of public dockets.

SUMMARY: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are announcing a public meeting to discuss and begin development of a comprehensive strategic Federal food safety plan. The purpose of the strategic plan is to reduce the annual incidence of acute and chronic foodborne and waterborne illness by further enhancing the safety of the nation's food supply. USDA, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and EPA are also establishing public dockets to receive comments about the Food Safety Initiative's strategic planning process and the plan.

DATES: The meeting will be held on October 2, 1998, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Comments should be submitted by November 25, 1998.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, 4301 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, VA.

For instructions on the submission of written and electronic comments, refer to Unit II. of this document.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To register for the meeting, contact Ms. Traci Phebus, of USDA, at (202) 501-7136, fax: (202) 501-7642, e-mail: foodsafetymeeting@usda.gov. Participants may reserve time for public comments when they register. Space will be allocated on a first come, first

served basis. Participants are encouraged to submit a disk along with their written statements in Wordperfect 5.1/6.1 or ASCII file format.

Questions regarding general arrangements and logistical matters should be addressed to Ms. Torrie Mattes. Additionally, participants who require a sign language interpreter or other special accommodations should contact Ms. Torrie Mattes, of USDA, no later than 10 days prior to the meeting, at (202) 501-7136, fax: (202) 501-7642, e-mail: T.Mattes@usda.gov.

For questions about the meeting or to obtain copies of the report, "Food Safety From Farm to Table: A National Food Safety Initiative," contact Ms. Karen Carson, of FDA, at (202) 205-5140, fax: (202) 205-5025, e-mail: kcarson@Bangate.fda.gov. Copies of the report also are available from the following web sites:

FDA at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsreport.html>

CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/foodsafety/report.htm>

EPA at <http://www.epa.gov/opptsfrs/home/nfssuppt.htm>

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>

Information about the National Academy of Sciences' report on "Ensuring Safe Food from Production to Consumption" can be found at the following web site: <http://www.nas.edu>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**I. Background**

On January 25, 1997, the President issued a directive to the Secretaries of USDA and HHS and the Administrator of EPA to work with consumers, producers, industry, States, Tribes, universities, and the public to identify ways to further improve the safety of our food supply, and to report back to him in 90 days. The Federal food safety agencies, working with their colleagues in the States, in the food industries, in academia, and with consumers, initially focused on the goal of reducing illness caused by microbial contamination of food and water. This goal was to be reached through systematic improvements in six key components of the food safety system: foodborne outbreak response coordination, surveillance, inspections, research, risk assessment, and education. The plan for meeting this goal was presented to the President in May 1997, in "Food Safety From Farm to Table: A National Food Safety Initiative." In October 1997, the President issued an additional directive to ensure the safety of domestic and imported fresh produce and other imported foods. This second directive

was incorporated into the National Food Safety Initiative (NFSI).

In less than 2 years, the agencies have taken significant strides forward in building a strengthened national food safety system. Building blocks for the infrastructure are in place: increased and targeted surveillance through FoodNet and PulseNet; coordination of Federal, State and local responses to outbreaks by the Foodborne Outbreak Response Coordinating Group (FORCG); expanded reliance on preventive controls (such as the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) based inspection systems for meat, poultry and seafood, and Good Agricultural and Good Manufacturing Practices guidance for produce); coordination of Federal food safety research; cooperation on risk assessment through the interagency Risk Assessment Consortium; leveraging inspection resources; and innovative public/private education partnerships. These efforts provide a common ground for moving forward.

In the May 1997 report, the food safety agencies made a commitment to prepare a 5-year comprehensive strategic plan, with the participation of all concerned parties. The President recently issued an Executive Order establishing a President's Food Safety Council which will now be responsible for development of a comprehensive strategic Federal food safety plan. A coordinated food safety strategic planning effort is needed to build on the common ground, and to tackle some of the difficult public health, resource, and management questions facing Federal food safety agencies. The strategic plan will focus on not just microbial contamination, but the full range of issues and actions necessary to ensure the safety of the food and water Americans use and consume. The charge is to develop a strategic long-range plan that can be used to help set priorities, improve coordination and efficiency, identify gaps in the current system and how to fill those gaps, enhance and strengthen prevention and intervention strategies, and identify measures to show progress. In developing the plan, the agencies will consider the conclusions and recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences' report on "Ensuring Safe Food from Production to Consumption" and the review of Federal food safety research and the research plan currently being developed by an interagency working group under the auspices of the National Science and Technology Council.

The food safety agencies have already taken the first steps to lay the

groundwork for development of the strategic plan, which the Council will now develop, by participating in interagency strategic planning sessions. The result is the following draft statement encompassing the agencies' vision for the U.S. food safety system and the roles of all those involved in food safety.

Consumers can be confident that food is safe, healthy, and affordable. We work within a seamless food safety system that uses farm-to-table preventive strategies and integrated research, surveillance, inspection, and enforcement. We are vigilant to new and emergent threats and consider the needs of vulnerable populations. We use science- and risk-based approaches along with public/private partnerships. Food is safe because everyone understands and accepts their responsibilities.

The next step is to engage consumers, producers, industry, food service providers, retailers, health professionals, State and local governments, Tribes, academia, and the public in the strategic planning process, beginning with a discussion of the draft vision statement and how to structure a strategic planning process that involves all interested parties and best addresses the important food safety challenges and makes the best use of the agencies' limited resources. This October 2nd meeting is the first of several public meetings to assist with development of a long-term strategic plan. Additional public meetings will be announced in the **Federal Register** prior to the date of each meeting.

The purpose of the October 2nd meeting is to obtain the public's view on a long-term vision for food safety in the U.S. and to identify a strategic planning process, goals, and critical steps as well as potential barriers to achieving that vision. The Council is interested in comments on the draft vision statement and suggestions for goals and how they might be achieved. Some questions to help frame the discussion follow.

1. Does the vision statement accurately depict an achievable food

safety system vision? What modifications, if any, would you make?

2. What are the barriers to pursuing this vision? What gaps currently exist in the food safety system that impede achievement of this vision?

3. To make the vision a reality, what changes are needed for: (a) government agencies at the Federal, State, and local level; (b) industry; (c) public health professionals; (d) consumers; and (e) others?

4. What should be the short-term goals and critical steps to realize this vision? What should be the long-term goals and steps?

5. What is the best way to involve the public in development of a long-term food safety strategic plan? What additional steps besides public meetings would be beneficial?

II. Public Dockets and Submission of Comments

The agencies are announcing the establishment of public dockets about the Food Safety Initiative Strategic Plan. Comments submitted to the dockets are to be identified with the appropriate docket number. For those comments directed to USDA, use Docket No. 98-045N, and for comments directed to FDA, use Docket No. 97N-0074. Commenters are encouraged to submit a disk along with their written comments in Wordperfect 5.1/6.1 or ASCII file format. Submit written comments (in triplicate) to:

USDA/FSIS

USDA/FSIS Hearing Clerk, 300 12th St., SW., Rm. 102 Cotton Annex, Washington, DC 20250-3700
FDA

Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305), Food and Drug Administration, 12420 Parklawn Drive, Rm. 1-23, Rockville, MD 20857

Electronic Comments

Comments may also be submitted electronically to: oppts.homepage@epa.gov. All comments and data in electronic form must be identified by the docket number

"OPP-00550." Electronic comments must be submitted as an ASCII file avoiding the use of special characters and any form of encryption.

Transcripts

Transcripts of the public meetings may be requested in writing from the Freedom of Information Office (HFI-35), Food and Drug Administration, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rm. 12A-16, Rockville, MD 20857, approximately 15 working days after the meeting at a cost of 10 cents per page. The transcripts of the public meetings will be available for public examination at the FDA Dockets Management Branch (address above) between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays. Transcripts of the meetings will also be available on the internet at: <http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/default.htm> and <http://www.epa.gov/opptsfrs/home/nfssuppt.htm>.

Electronic Docket

The public docket in its entirety will be available on the internet at: <http://www.epa.gov/opptsfrs/home/rules.htm#docket>.

List of Subjects

Environmental protection, Food safety.

Dated: August 20, 1998.

Catherine E. Woteki,

Undersecretary for Food Safety, United States Department of Agriculture.

Dated: August 20, 1998.

James A. O'Hara,

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, Department of Health and Human Services.

Dated: August 20, 1998.

Lynn R. Goldman,

Assistant Administrator for Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances, Environmental Protection Agency.

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