



## **GFSF Food Safety News (May 20, 2011)**

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## ***GFSF in News***

### **In China, Fear of Fake Eggs and 'Recycled' Buns**

**May 7, 2011**

On a bustling corner near downtown Shanghai recently, some shoppers avoided the steamed buns sold by Zhu Qinghe in a street-side cubbyhole. Instead, they bought the packaged buns in the freezer section of Hualian, a supermarket chain store in the same building.

"No fake goods at Hualian supermarket; buy any product with no worries," a sign said on the window of the market, which was found to have sold tainted buns. Big mistake: Mr. Zhu's buns were soft, tasty and fresh, made every day, he said, at 3 a.m. The supermarket's, on the other hand, came from a filthy workshop where workers "recycled" buns after their sell-by date. The workers merely threw the stale buns into a vat, added water and flour, and repackaged them to be sold anew.

It has been two years since [China's](#) government, reeling from nationwide outrage over [melamine](#)-contaminated baby milk that sickened 300,000 infants and killed at least 6, declared [food safety](#) a national priority. Since then, it has threatened, raided and arrested throngs of shady food processors — and even executed a couple.

But a stomach-turning string of food-safety scandals this spring, from recycled buns to contaminated pork, makes it clear that official efforts are falling short. Despite efforts to create a modern food-safety regimen, oversight remains utterly haphazard, in the hands of ill-trained, ill-equipped and outnumbered enforcers whose quick fixes are even more quickly undone.

"Most of them are working like headless chickens, having no clue what are the major food-borne diseases that need to be addressed or what are the major contaminants in the food process," said Dr. Peter Ben Embarek, a food safety expert with the [World Health Organization's](#) Beijing office.

In recent weeks, China's news media have reported sales of pork adulterated with the drug clenbuterol, which can cause heart palpitations; pork sold as beef after it was soaked in borax, a detergent additive; rice contaminated with cadmium, a heavy metal discharged by smelters; arsenic-laced soy sauce; popcorn and mushrooms treated with fluorescent bleach; bean sprouts tainted with an animal antibiotic; and wine diluted with sugared water and chemicals.

Even eggs, seemingly sacrosanct in their shells, have turned out not to be eggs at all but man-made concoctions of chemicals, gelatin and paraffin. Instructions can be purchased online, the Chinese media reported.

Scandals are proliferating, in part, because producers operate in a cutthroat environment in which illegal additives are everywhere and cost-effective. Manufacturers calculate correctly that the odds of profiting from unsafe practices far exceed the odds of getting caught, experts say.



China's explosive growth has spawned nearly half a million food producers, the authorities say, and four-fifths of them employ 10 or fewer workers, making oversight difficult.

China's iron political controls ensure that no powerful consumer lobby exists to agitate for reform, press lawsuits that punish wayward producers or lobby the government to pay as much attention to consumer safety as it does to controlling threats to its own power. Instead, like Alice after falling through the rabbit hole, consumers must guess what their food and drink contain.

**“Basically, people now feel nothing is safe to eat,” said Sang Liwei, who directs the Beijing office of the Global Food Safety Forum, a private agency. “They don’t know what choices to make. They are really feeling very helpless.”**

Chinese consumers may have their hands tied compared with their Western counterparts, but they are increasingly middle-class, well-educated and dismayed by their lack of protection. Even top officials are discomfited.

“All of these nasty cases of food-safety problems are enough to show that lack of integrity and moral decline have become a very serious problem,” Prime Minister [Wen Jiabao](#) told government officials in mid-April, according to The People’s Daily.

“We feel really ashamed,” Vice Premier Wang Qishan said at a meeting in March with legislators, according to Xinhua, the official news agency. “Just when the people have enough to feed themselves, we have this food-safety problem. Really embarrassing, this is really embarrassing for us.”

Some progress is evident. China adopted a far-reaching food-safety law in 2009 and is bringing hundreds of standards in line with international norms. Already, nearly half of dairy food companies have been ordered to halt production after failing to meet new licensing requirements.

“The situation is steadily improving, “ said Luo Yunbo, the dean of the food sciences college at China Agricultural University in Beijing. “It is not as bad as people think it is.”

Nor is it good. The health minister, Chen Zhu, said in February that China did not have enough enforcement agents, with fewer than one food inspector for every 10,000 people. Instead of systematically identifying the safety risks and forcing producers to prove that they have eliminated them, said Dr. Ben Embarek of the World Health Organization, Chinese inspectors follow a long-discredited strategy of randomly sampling and testing products.

Some food is simply unregulated. Pork accounts for two-thirds of the meat eaten by Chinese consumers, but only half of it goes through slaughterhouses that are subject to inspection, he said. The rest comes from pigs slaughtered in backyards, villages or markets and is essentially untested, he said.

Oversight remains shared among disparate bureaucracies: the Commerce Ministry supervises pork slaughterhouses, Dr. Ben Embarek said, but beef and poultry slaughterhouses fall under the Agriculture Ministry.



国际食品安全协会

Even the government's most dramatic crackdowns have fallen short. After the 2008 milk-powder scandal drew international attention, the authorities ordered all melamine-tainted dairy products to be destroyed. But they have turned up again and again.

Last week, the police in Chongqing in southwestern China uncovered 26 tons of melamine-tainted milk powder at a factory that made [ice cream](#) bars, The People's Daily reported.

Clenbuterol is another recurring problem. According to the Chinese news media, the drug was banned in animal feed nearly a decade ago because it can cause heart palpitations and other health problems in humans. But experts say it remains widely available. Many farmers continue to feed it to pigs because it helps the animals develop more muscle and less fat and allows them to be sold for slaughter more quickly.

Just last month, the Shuanghui Group, one of China's largest meat producers, recalled thousands of tons of meat and meat products after news reports that a company affiliate had processed pork from pigs that were fed clenbuterol.

Consumers have also been repeatedly poisoned by excessive levels of the chemical nitrite in meat, Feng Ping, a professor at the Beijing Academy of Food Sciences, told an international food-safety conference last month. The most recent suspected case occurred April 21 when a 1-year-old Beijing girl died after eating fried chicken bought from an outdoor vendor, a local newspaper reported.

How many others fall sick or die from contaminated food is anyone's guess because data on food-borne diseases is spotty at best. "We operate in the dark in many ways," Dr. Ben Embarek said.

Consumers are not the only victims. Unscrupulous producers hurt reputable manufacturers. Imported dairy products nearly quintupled in volume in 2009, the year after the melamine scandal, government officials say. Foreign brands now account for half of all infant milk powder sold in China.

Now steamed buns are taking a hit.

"I am no longer eating steamed buns," a 65-year-old Shanghai man, who gave his last name as Chen, declared in front of a supermarket window emblazoned with the motto "No fake goods in Hualian."

The supermarket chain and other retailers that have sold the buns have blamed its supplier, the Shanghai Shenglu Food Company. The authorities have revoked the supplier's license and have arrested five of the firm's managers, according to Chinese news media reports.

But Mr. Chen is not reassured.

"None of them are reliable," he spat. "They really have no morals. They will do anything for money."

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/>



## Growing concern over school milk program

2011-04-28

A national school milk program intended to improve children's health has soured again.

On April 22, 251 children at Yuhe Town Central Primary School in Yulin, Shaanxi province, fell ill after drinking school milk produced by the Mengniu Dairy Group. They were sent to the hospital for treatment, and were all discharged by the following day.

Test results released on Tuesday afternoon said the milk met China's national standards for food safety, and no pathogens were detected in the milk or the students' vomit and feces. They did not say why 251 students suffered from the discomforts collectively.

The tests were conducted by Yulin's Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the results were announced by the city's food safety committee.

On Tuesday evening, Mengniu said on its website that it would work with the school and the local health department to track the students' health. But public confidence in China's developing school milk program suffered another blow.

Dairy enterprises are impaired by suspected and real poisoning incidents and low profits. Schools stay out of the program because they do not want to be implicated in safety scandals. And the country has no unified management or supervision of the program it started in 2000.

Milk producers and local watchdogs are the first to be blamed for bad quality control, but experts also have doubts about the guiding theory behind the program.

Two tests, two results

Mengniu breathed a corporate sigh of relief at the test report, but food safety experts didn't let it go easily.

**"Why do accidents always happen at branch plants?" said Sang Liwei, a food-safety lawyer in Beijing and a representative of the Global Food Safety Forum, a non-governmental organization.**

**The milk the Yulin children drank was processed at a local plant in Baoji that is owned by Inner Mongolia-based Mengniu. "One month ago," Sang said, "milk withdrawn from circulation was also produced by a subsidiary plant", that one in Zhengzhou, Henan province, and owned by Shanghai Bright Dairy & Food.**

**Mengniu was involved in two milk incidents in Shaanxi province within the past year, but test results for both set it free. Experts called for a new test by higher authorities.**

**Sang mentioned safety concerns at Nongfu Spring in Haikou, Hainan province, in 2009. Haikou Municipal Industrial and Commercial Bureau detected excessive mercury in the drinking water, but a later test by the provincial bureau showed the water met standards.**



"No matter what happened behind the scenes, it at least showed that two tests can give different answers," Sang said.

Food safety experts said if the questioned milk indeed passed the tests, then the standard for dairy products in China is doubtful.

"We have two tests: qualitative and quantitative," Sang said. "Sanlu's baby formula had also been qualified before 2008, because there wasn't a test target for melamine," Sang said.

An estimated 300,000 infants, including six who died from kidney stones or other kidney damage, became victims of baby formula produced by Sanlu Group Co in 2008. The chemical melamine, which was added to the milk, caused it to appear to have higher protein content.

So what really caused the Yulin schoolchildren to become ill?

Hours after the test results were announced, Mengniu suggested two possible reasons - the "unscientific" way the children drank the milk and hysteria, because "only 16 students vomited and felt nausea at first".

"After drinking the cold milk on an empty belly, some students experienced upper abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and other symptoms of gastritis," said Zhao Yuanhua, vice-president of Mengniu Dairy Group.

Parents were skeptical. "Is this blaming the children's poor physical condition? Could it be said that hundreds of students are all in poor condition?" Chen, parent of a third-grader, was quoted by the Beijing News as saying.

Zhao told China Daily there are other reasons to believe the milk was safe. "Students at another primary school in Hanzhong, Shaanxi province, drank 700 cartons of milk from the same batch, but none experienced discomfort." Zhao said teachers at the Yulin school have said the symptoms appeared first among 16 students and then seemed to spread. "That might be caused by hysteria," he said.

Mental health experts said it can happen. "If several children began to vomit and have stomachaches, it's possible that hundreds of others may be influenced . . . and undergo a collective reaction," said Ji Xuesong, a professor at Peking University's institute of mental health. "If some students showed symptoms like nausea and vomiting, a teacher should avoid asking if others have the same feelings," Zhao said. "Asking that may make more children get infected."

### **An outbreak**

When China launched its national school milk program, nine ministries and bureaus established a coordination group, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture.

School milk carries special symbols on its packaging and cannot be sold in the marketplace. Authorized enterprises must pass expert evaluation and approval of the coordination group. The price of school milk must be lower than the market price of similar products in the same region.



"Direct delivery was compulsive, and the service was regulated," Wang Dingmian, former vice-chairman of the Guangdong Provincial Dairy Association, told China Daily. "But when the management system ended in 2003 and the administration and approval rights were passed on to local departments below the provincial level, problems began to erupt."

The incident with the widest impact happened in Haicheng, Liaoning province, in March 2003. A total of 3,936 students and 260 teachers in eight primary schools showed symptoms after drinking soymilk at school. A 13-year-old girl died. An investigation found that the food poisoning was caused by the soy flour, the raw material used in soymilk.

Five years later, 152 children in several kindergartens in Zhuhai and Jiangmen, Guangdong province, were poisoned when they drank milk processed by Zhuhai Bigshot Dairy Co. The company did not meet the qualifications for supplying school milk but had long been a major supplier for local schools.

The Ministry of Health reported, "The milk was contaminated by a kind of coccus (bacterium) in the process of adding ingredients, and was not effectively disinfected."

Five incidents occurred in April 2010 in Shaanxi province. In two cases, investigations showed that the milk from Mengniu Dairy Group and another dairy giant, Yili Industrial Group, met national standards for food safety.

Shaanxi Renrengao Dairy, a private company based in Baoji, was the culprit in two of the cases. Its filling machines did not seal milk packages well, so air leaked in and the milk spoiled.

The company had acquired a license for manufacturing of industrial products, a food hygiene license and ISO9001 quality management accreditation.

No reports were found about how the enterprises were punished. Bigshot and Renrengao have multiple product lines today.

In the fifth case, nine pupils at Qianwei town's Andai Primary School in Lantian county suffered abdominal pain after ingesting milk and eggs at school. No reports about the culprit were found.

Well off target

China's school milk program is still in a fledgling phase, covering only 1 percent of students. The original target was 30 percent in 2010.

The program's broader goals were to improve the health of children and teenagers, advocate the concept of scientific diet, and promote the rapid development of the dairy industry.

In 2000, five major cities carried out pilot programs. By 2006, four of them had sunk in stagnancy.

For example, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission called it quits after the soymilk poisoning in Liaoning province in 2003. Guangzhou had been the best performer, but participation dropped from 40 percent in 2007 to 12 percent this year, according to a milk market analysis and a dairy industry plan from Guangzhou.



The national school milk program continues, but experts say it seemingly has become philanthropy.

**"Parents in developed cities are more willing to buy expensive and high-quality milk for their children by themselves," said Sang, the food-safety lawyer. "So the school milk project is now more noticeable in backward areas, including many cases where local governments pay the bill."**

**Experts say that if the program is called off in some areas, students will be harmed.**

**"The school milk program should be a boon for students nationwide," Sang said. "Local governments shouldn't give it up for fear of milk scandals. Large-scale businesses and State-owned enterprises can take part in and shoulder more social responsibilities."**

'Invest in children'

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reports that 62 countries have implemented school milk programs. Roughly half are developed countries and half are developing.

Experts are frustrated to see the program cannot find its place in China. They attributed the failure to weak supervision and overwhelming business costs.

Wang, the former Guangdong dairy association official, said a local permit to produce school milk is a stepping stone for companies to enter a local market. But once the permit is obtained, he said, companies might not strictly follow the processes and meet the standards for student milk.

Detection equipment, inspectors and other means of ensuring product safety are costly, Sang said. If an enterprise cannot produce a profit - remember, the school milk price must be lower than market price - it has fewer resources to ensure the quality of its products.

Even local watchdogs have proved to be of little help. "In many areas, one could find a 'school milk office, which is responsible for supervising the local school milk program," Wang said. However, he added, the office usually has other responsibilities that take priority.

**Experts suggested a national program that is fully carried out by the government as a solution.**

**"It can be managed by the cooperative efforts of the Ministry of Education, quality inspection department and others, who are in charge of unified bidding, establishing a long-term mechanism and implementing strong penalties," Sang said. "This is also a good way to prevent collusion of local governments and businesses."**

Wang came up with the same solution. "The government can set up a production chain and supervise the whole process, from raw material collection to delivery."

In many places, especially well-developed ones, Wang said, local governments are doing well on social service programs. "Why can't we invest more in children?"



**Sang said China can learn from the United States, which experienced serious food safety problems a century ago but reversed its plight. The president, Theodore Roosevelt, was determined to make a change. Later, the Food and Drug Administration and a quality inspection system were established in succession.**

**"The Chinese government can also solve the problem," Sang said, "and the key is determination."**

Source: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>

### **Global Food Safety Forum (GFSF) on need to improve food safety enforcement in China**

April 19, 2011

Members of a body that advises the State Council have added their voices to Premier Wen Jiabao's and called for the government to strengthen law enforcement and supervision to reverse the trend that has seen a growing number of scandals involving food safety.

Wen told a host of newly appointed members of the Counselors' Office of the State Council and the Central Research Institute of Culture and History that he regards the food safety issue as a matter of morality and culture building. He made the remarks while addressing the prominent scholars at an appointment ceremony on Thursday. Wen's words resonated with the members who said the issue even goes beyond morality.

"Apart from moral condemnation, the resolution of this problem also requires integral efforts from different authorities, especially the law enforcement departments and supervisory bodies," Tang Min, a new counselor who is also vice-chairman of the China Social Entrepreneur Foundation, told China Daily on Monday.

During his speech, Wen called on the counselors to convey the people's wishes without concealing anything, citing food safety scandals that have been a problem recently including melamine-contaminated infant formula, steamed buns that had been dyed with unidentified chemicals, the use of "lean meat powder" and poor-quality recycled cooking oil known as "gutter oil" as examples of moral deterioration.

"A country will never grow into a real mighty and respected power without the improvement of its people's lives and without the power of morality," Wen said.

**Sang Liwei, a representative of the Global Food Safety Forum, told China Daily that the government needs to address food safety problems directly and should not take up minor issues and evade the big ones.**

**"Legislation and morality are two different approaches in addressing social issues such as food safety. It will be one-sided if the government just emphasizes one of the two and neglects the other," he said.**

Source: Xinhua



## **China News**

### **Tainted milk powder seized in Chinese warehouses**

China was fighting to maintain public confidence in its food safety after a massive stockpile of melamine-tainted milk powder was seized during raids on warehouses in the nation's biggest city.

27 Apr 2011

The seizures in Chongqing come three years after the 2008 Sanlu milk scandal, in which three babies died and 300,000 others were sickened by melamine-tainted milk in an episode that fatally undermined already fragile public trust in the government's ability to keep food safe.

The discovery of the tainted milk powder, which was due to be made into pastry and ice cream, has drawn attention to the inability of China's government to police China's vast and fragmented food chain.

In a bid to restore confidence, the city authorities in Chongqing, a municipal area with 35m inhabitants, have announced a 100-day crackdown on food and drug fraud in a mirror-image of a crackdown last year on mafia crime.

On Monday some 7,900 police in Chongqing were reportedly deployed to conduct city-wide raids on 600 premises suspected of producing illegal or fake food and pharmaceuticals.

Some 917 cases were already under investigation in Chongqing, according to local reports, including the use of the textile dye Rhodamine B in broad bean paste; the discovery of formalin, an industrial preserving and clotting agent in the city's famed hotpot restaurants, and industrial carbon dioxide to carbonate beer.

The dramatic show of force in Chongqing, which will involve 10,000 law enforcement officials and continue until March 31, is also an indication of how seriously China's government takes the threat of food scandals which have the potential to cause widespread hysteria and social unrest.

Last month Chinese housewives embarked on a crazed salt-buying spree after internet reports suggested – erroneously – that the iodine in salt could protect against radiation fallout caused by the explosions at the Fukushima nuclear plants in Japan.

For several days the Chinese government pleaded and ordered the public to stop buying the salt, but were ignored, in a further sign of the dangerous lack of trust that exists between the Chinese public and their government.

Many Chinese are still angry and skeptical after learning how the 2008 Sanlu scandal had been hushed up for several months in order to protect against any national embarrassment during that year's Olympic Games.

Despite the threat of capital punishment for those found breaking food regulations, China has continued to be shocked by almost monthly food scandals, a fact which is widely attributed to the endemic corruption among Chinese officials who take bribes to turn a blind eye.



Earlier this month 286 people were sickened in the central province of Hunan after eating pork contaminated with the steroid clenbuterol, which was used to make the meat leaner, while in the Southern province of Guangdong 17 noodle makers were shut down after they were discovered using ink, industrial dye and paraffin wax in their products.

China has some of the toughest food regulations in the world, but has struggled to enforce them adequately.

Last weekend its Ministry of Health published a blacklist of 151 banned additives and launched a year-long campaign to stamp out the use of clenbuterol, or "lean meat powder" as farmers call it, in pork production.

The campaign was backed at the highest levels with Vice-Premier Li Keqiang, the head of a cabinet-level committee on food safety and the man expected to take over from Wen Jiabao as China's number two leader next year.

Mr Li promised "a firm attitude, iron hand and more effort" in dealing with food safety problems, including the use of capital punishment.

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>

## Amid Scandal, China Bans More Food Additives

Apr 26, 2011

Just days after a string of headline-grabbing food safety scandals, China's food safety authority is expanding the list of forbidden or abusable additives and chemicals. Now 151 materials, many of which are used for economic adulteration, are blacklisted: 47 are inedible materials, 22 are food additives that are "easily abused" and 82 are substances forbidden in feed and drinking water for animals, according to official state media Xinhua.

A State Council committee on food safety has been adding chemicals and other substances to the list for the past several years as more and more tainted food scandals have garnered public scrutiny in China. In the past few weeks alone, hundreds have been [seriously sickened by clenbuterol-tainted pork](#), over a dozen noodle makers were [ordered to stop production](#) because they were using ink, industrial dyes and paraffin wax as ingredients, and [16 tons of pork were pulled from the marketplace](#) for containing sodium borate, a chemical that seemingly transforms cheap pork into darker, higher-value "beef."

Last month, Chinese officials arrested 12 people for involvement in a 40-ton bean sprout debacle. In northeast China, farmers were using sodium nitrite (a known carcinogen), urea, antibiotics, and a plant hormone called 6-benzaladenine to make the sprouts grow faster and look shinier, according to international wire reports.

China is "waging a prolonged and stringent fight against the illegal use of additives in food," according to Xinhua. Vice Premier Li Keqiang said this week he promised "a firm attitude, iron hand measures and more efforts" in dealing with food safety issues.

"Those who were found to produce illegal additives should be investigated immediately and



punished severely," Li added. "As to those companies who intended to use illegal food additives, their businesses should be forced to close and the people in charge should be forbidden to be involved in the food industry."

Source: <http://www.foodsafetynews.com/>

## 251 Pupils Sick after Having Milk in NW China

2011-04-22

A total of 251 pupils fell ill after drinking milk at a school in Northwest China's Shaanxi province Friday morning, said local authorities.

Sixteen pupils showed signs of illness, including fever, abdominal pain and diarrhea, after drinking the milk provided to the Yuhe Town Central Primary School in Yuyang district, Yulin city. Seventy students were hospitalized for observation and forty-four students remained in the outpatient department for observation as of 6 pm.

The milk was purchased by the district's education bureau and then distributed to the students every morning. There was plain milk, yogurt and milk with walnut flavor. The 16 students with signs of poisoning all had plain milk. The school's milk inventory has been sealed off. The milk's producer has arrived to assist in the ongoing investigation.

The last eight sick students have been cured and discharged from the hospital Wednesday after bacteria-soaked milk poisoned about 200 middle and primary school children in northwest China's Shaanxi Province.

Samples of the milk that had been drunk in schools in Xunyang County, Shaanxi Province, were tested and found to have **a bacterium density of 16,400 per gram of milk, far exceeding the limit of 10 per gram**, said Zhang Jiman, director of a laboratory of the county disease control center.

Tests of 100 ml of milk also found 230 E.Coli bacteria per gram, while the safe limit was three, said Zhang. About 100 middle and primary school students started to vomit and had stomach aches after drinking school breakfast milk Monday. Twenty were treated with intravenous drips, said Zhang.

Similar milk food poisoning cases were also reported in Shaanxi's Mian County Monday, where more than 100 students showed the same symptoms. All of the hospitalized children in Mian County have been discharged from hospital Tuesday.

The milk was delivered to the schools by Baoji-based Shaanxi Renrengao Dairy Co., Ltd., a large milk processor and supplier in the province. All schools in the two counties have been asked by local education authorities to stop using Renrengao's milk as breakfast for students. More samples have been sent to Shaanxi Provincial Quality and Technical Supervision Bureau for further testing.

Source: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>



## **International News**

### **Report Ranks Riskiest Food-Pathogen Combinations**

Apr 28, 2011

Fourteen foodborne pathogens cost \$14.1 billion and present a significant public health burden, according to a report released today by the University of Florida's Emerging Pathogens Institute. The study is the first comprehensive ranking of pathogen-food combinations, identifying the top 10 riskiest pairs.

Campylobacter and poultry, Toxoplasma and pork (and unknown sources), Listeria and deli meats, Salmonella and poultry, and Listeria in dairy products top the list. Next in the ranking: both Salmonella and Norovirus from "complex foods," Salmonella from produce, Toxoplasma from Beef, and Salmonella from eggs.

Ninety percent of the health burden is caused by five pathogens: Salmonella, Campylobacter, Listeria monocytogenes, Toxoplasma gondii and norovirus. These bugs are responsible for an estimated \$12.7 billion in annual economic loss.

The authors of the 70-page report, which was supported by a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, hope the analysis will help federal regulators target finite food safety resources based on risk.

The Food Safety Modernization Act, signed into law in January, directs FDA to adopt a more preventative, risk-based approach, but, as the report authors note, "doesn't spell out exactly how this should be done."

"The number of hazards and scale of the food system make for a critical challenge for consumers and government alike," said Michael Batz, lead author of the report and head of Food Safety Programs at the Emerging Pathogens Institute. "Government agencies must work together to effectively target their efforts. If we don't identify which pairs of foods and microbes present the greatest burden, we'll waste time and resources and put even more people at risk."

To estimate such risks, researchers calculated the public health burden using the cost of medical care and lost productivity from employee sick days, in addition to the expenses associated with serious complications or chronic disabilities that result from the acute illness, and then paired illness with food attribution.

Poultry contaminated with Campylobacter topped the risk ranking, sickening more than 600,000 Americans and costing \$1.3 billion annually. Salmonella in poultry ranked fourth with more than 200,000 illnesses and \$700 million in costs. The UF researchers question whether new safety standards announced by the USDA for young chickens and turkeys are sufficient, and recommend evaluating and tightening these standards over time.

The report also recommends that the FDA and USDA develop a joint Salmonella initiative that coordinates efforts, that agencies strengthen Listeria prevention programs in part by improving education efforts aimed at pregnant women (who are more at risk, especially for miscarriages).



Other recommendations include: Battling the number of Norovirus illnesses by strengthening state and local food safety programs through increased funding, training and adoption by states of the most recent FDA Food Code and continuing to target E. coli O157:H7.

Source: <http://www.foodsafetynews.com/>

## Can Marketing Orders Improve Leafy Green Safety?

Apr 27, 2011

In revising a plan that had been criticized by consumer groups and others, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has proposed a program to establish a voluntary, national marketing agreement to set safety standards and regulate the handling of leafy green vegetables.

The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) [released an outline](#) Tuesday of the program, called the National Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (NLGMA), which it said would reduce the potential for contamination of lettuce, spinach, cabbage and other leafy greens.

If accepted by the Secretary of Agriculture, the agreement would allow member producers to obtain a USDA seal of approval certifying that their products are in compliance with food safety requirements.

The NLGMA is intended to restore consumer confidence in leafy greens, which suffered a blow in 2006 when more than 200 people were sickened, and five died, in an outbreak E. coli infections traced to spinach grown in California.

After leafy green producers in California and Arizona created their own statewide marketing agreements in 2007, industry members began to call for a national set of voluntary leafy green regulations. In June of 2009, 12 industry organizations issued [an initial proposal](#) for such an agreement.

Since that time, the effort to create an industry-driven food safety plan [has come under fire](#) by critics who claim it would allow producers to police themselves. The critics also said the plan would be prohibitive to small farms and favor large producers, and cause harm to the environment by introducing more chemicals and using more natural resources.

Consumers Union, for example, called federal marketing agreements an inappropriate way to ensure the safety of leafy greens. The organization said that should be the responsibility of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and that the FDA should do its job more vigorously.

This latest version of the NLGMA includes several changes designed to address some of the concerns, many of which were expressed during a series of public hearings held by AMS. The revisions, according to federal regulators, provide greater representation for small and organic farms and more attention to conservation.

Some of the most significant changes to the agreement include:



-- Expanding the number of administrative zones from 5 to 8, in order to take into account the differences in climate, production practices and handling practices between the countries various regions.

-- Naming 26 board members to oversee implementation of the NLGMA, up from the original 23. Two of these members must be small farmers.

-- Creating a Technical Review Committee to ensure that the board's requirements align with FDA food safety requirements, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), Good Handling Practices (GHPs) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs). At least one committee member must be a small farmer, and one must be a certified organic farmer.

-- Representation by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which will furnish a committee member.

"Board representation was very critical based on the comments we received," said Rayne Pegg, AMS administrator, in a news conference. "People really wanted to ensure that there was grower representation, that there was representation of different sized operations so they would have a voice in the discussions."

As for those worried about the environment, she said, "There were a lot of concerns over co-management with food safety practices and conservation practices, so the proposal includes the NRCS having a seat on the Technical Review Committee."

Some have already voiced their disapproval of the revised proposal.

"... the USDA is now allowing the industry that brought us E. coli-tainted spinach to police itself," said Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food and Water Watch, in a [statement](#).

"Developing food safety standards in a marketing process is inappropriate and could leave consumers and small, organic and independent producers out of the process. It also adds confusion and potential overlap to the ongoing process of implementing the new FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, which gives the Food and Drug Administration the authority for developing produce standards," she said.

Supporters of the initiative, however, say California's experience has already demonstrated that a marketing agreement can promote food safety. Spending on food safety more than doubled in 2008 and 2009 among growers who signed the agreement, advocates note, and 99 percent of California's leafy greens were under LGMA's auditing program by November of 2009.

Friday marks the beginning of a 90-day public comment period on the proposal. After that closes, the Secretary of Agriculture will determine whether or not to approve the agreement.

Source: <http://www.foodsafetynews.com/>

## **Globalization forces FDA to prioritize global food safety**

22-Apr-2011

[www.gfsf.org.cn](http://www.gfsf.org.cn)

**Global Food Safety Forum (GFSF) 国际食品安全协会 15**



**The quickening pace of globalization has forced the Food and Drug Administration to place progress towards an integrated global food safety system center stage in priorities plan covering the years up to 2015.**

Within its 50-page [strategy](#) document, Strategic Priorities 2011 – 2015: Responding to the Public Health Challenges of the 21st Century, comes the frank admission: “*The growing challenges of globalization have far outstripped the FDA’s resources for inspection and quality monitoring, and the inability to maintain adequate oversight means potential [risk](#) to consumers grows every year.*”

### **Stopping threats**

“*Addressing these challenges will require a paradigm shift — to a focus on prevention, on stopping threats before they ever become reality. The border must be viewed as a final checkpoint for preventive controls, rather than the primary line of defense against unsafe imports.*”

An increasingly globalized world means that “...*ensuring the safety of food, drugs, and devices for the American people is a global endeavor that integrates products and people across borders,*” according to the strategy document.

To support its view, FDA highlighted the growing volume and complexity of imported products, national security threats, greater opportunities for economic adulteration and intentional fraud, corporations lacking accountability and enforcement tools that do not reflect today’s commercial practices.

More than 20m import lines of food, devices, drugs, and cosmetics arrived at US ports of entry in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, more than three times the number of imports 10 years ago.

To guard against the threat this brought, FDA stressed the need for more information about product supply chains and the importance of monitoring information throughout the product life cycle.

It further highlighted the need for regulatory standards to foster corporate responsibility to identify, protect, and control risks together with coordination among foreign, federal, and state counterparts.

### **Adequate funding**

The administration called for updated compliance and enforcement tools and new adequate funding to allow for inspections, examinations and sample collections and analysis, and updated systems, including IT support. “*These changes are essential if we are to protect product safety in a way that Americans expect and deserve,*” it said.

Within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), FDA is responsible for ensuring the safety and effectiveness of products that account for about 20 cents of every dollar spent by American consumers each year.



That includes 80 percent of the food supply, biological products, medical devices, cosmetics, radiation-emitting products, and tobacco products plus human and animal drugs.

Margaret Hamburg, FDA commissioner, pledged her administration to science-based decision-making. *“Science underlies everything we do,” she said. “To serve the public health, we must have the capacity to effectively oversee the translation of breakthrough discoveries in science into innovative, safe, and effective products and life-saving therapies.”*

Source: <http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/>

## ***Evolving Technology***

### **Nano-based packaging more acceptable to consumers**

21-Apr-2011

**Consumers remain concerned over the use of nanomaterials in the food industry but appear less anxious about employing the technology in packaging than ingredient formulation, a UK report has said.**

The survey by the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) also warned that manufacturers risk consumer rejection of nano-based products in a similar way to genetically-modified foods, unless they start engaging over their perceptions of the hazards involved.

The study was conducted by research agency TNS-BMRB and was commissioned following publication of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report into [nanotechnology](#) last year, chaired by Sir John Krebs.

#### **Positive packaging reaction**

While subjects raised general concerns over the application of nanotechnology directly on foods, there was greater acceptance of nano-based packaging.

Food packaging that extended shelf life, better preserved foods or detected when products were spoiled were *“generally viewed as useful applications,”* according to the report. The finding came despite previous fears expressed that not enough was known about the effects of so-called “hard” [nanomaterials](#) used in packaging.

This favorable perception was based on using nanotechnology to reduce food [waste](#), preserve taste and save money through eliminating the need to repurchase products.

Such assumed benefits were based on further research demonstrating that nanomaterials did not migrate from packaging into food.

Initial consumer scepticism regarding nano-sensors to detect food spoilage was overcome by a recognition that not only would this help cut waste but it would also boost food safety by flagging up contamination, particularly in large-scale applications.



## Consumer fears

Central to public fears is uncertainty over the rationale behind developing the technology and the suspicion that industry players rather than consumers stand to benefit more from its increasing use.

A spokesman for TNS-BMRB said consumer concerns are not allayed by the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes a nanoparticle, including particle size, engineered versus naturally occurring particles, and “soft” (soluble or digestible) or “hard” (insoluble) particles.

*“Consumer lack of knowledge generates scepticism – this goes all the way back to pasteurization,”* said the FSA’s chief scientist Dr. Andrew Wadge. *“They need to perceive the benefits, similar to microwaves, where the advantages outweighed the potential risks.”*

Dr Sandy Lawrie, secretary of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, which advises the FSA, added, *“There is a suspicion by consumers that the industry has lots going on behind closed doors, when in actuality little is.”*

The report found underlying concerns about nanotechnology revolved around long-term health and environmental impacts, product cost increases and a lack of transparency of information from the industry.

*“I believe it’s for regulators and the industry to be transparent and to work together to explain to people what nanotechnology is and how it can be used in food,”* added Wadge.

Source: <http://www.foodproductiondaily.com/>

## Legislation

### Dairy associations: New labeling bill is not COOL at all

27-Apr-2011

**Legislation designed to help US dairy farmers could have the unintended consequence of encouraging firms to replace dairy ingredients from US suppliers with non-dairy ingredients just to avoid labeling headaches, trade associations have warned.**

The Dairy [COOL](#) Act of 2011 ([S 831](#)) introduced to Congress by Senator Al Franken (D-MN, pictured) last week, calls for country-of-origin labeling (COOL) on liquid milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, butter and ‘any other dairy product’.

However, it could end up encouraging manufacturers to “*substitute vegetable-based or other protein ingredients instead of dairy ingredients*” just to avoid the hassle of having to explain where their dairy ingredients come from, warned the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA).

**Unnecessary and restrictive**



Describing the bill - which follows Senator [Sherrod](#) Brown's abortive attempt to extend COOL to dairy in 2009 - as “*unnecessary and restrictive*” IDFA has also taken issue with its vague terminology.

*“The phrase ‘any other dairy product’ is problematic and open to interpretation,”* added a spokeswoman.

*“For instance, in the recently released rule to implement the dairy import assessment, USDA included cocoas and bakers’ dough under the category of ‘dairy products’.”*

It could also antagonize trading partners, added Jerry Slominski, IDFA senior vice president of legislative affairs and economic policy. *“We now export more dairy than we import so I worry about legislation like this that could invite retaliation from our trading partners and limit a growing part of our industry.”*

Meanwhile, there was nothing stopping firms that did want to promote dairy products from local producers from doing so, he said. Existing legislation already required imported dairy products to be labeled with their country of origin, although this did not currently apply to ingredients, he added.

### **Protectionism by the back door?**

Crucially, the bill did not have the support of the very people it was designed to assist: dairy farmers, claimed Chris Galen from the National Milk Producers Federation.

*“Given the ongoing controversy over, and challenge with, implementing country of origin for meat products, and the learning curve involved in that regulation, we believe now is not the time to apply a similar requirement to dairy products. Canada’s and Mexico’s current dispute over the meat COOL regulation in the World Trade Organization is an indication of the challenges involved in this type of labeling.”*

He added, *“We hope the sponsors of this legislation, who are champions for dairy producers’ issues, will [instead] work with us on related labeling and regulatory issues that would promote the integrity of dairy labeling, such as raw milk, and the dairy terms [eg., soymilk] inappropriately applied to soy beverages.”*

### **COOL controversy**

COOL was introduced in the US in 2008, requiring origin labeling of meats, nuts and raw produce, but not dairy products or processed foods. However, it has proved deeply controversial, with some countries arguing it has damaged their trade with the US.

Meanwhile, proposals to apply COOL to more products in the EU Food Information Regulation have also caused [controversy in Europe](#) with many politicians holding out for COOL on all meat and poultry, milk and dairy products and other single-ingredient products, as well as for meat, poultry and fish when used as an ingredient in processed foods, something opposed by most food manufacturers.



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Most fluid milk products and natural cheeses made in the US were made with US-sourced milk, but many processed dairy foods contained dairy ingredients of US and foreign origin, “*the tradeoff often being a price point to determine the least cost supplier,*” said IDFA.

One industry source said he expected Franken’s bill would die at committee stage, however, adding, “*The bill was introduced in the last session of the Senate and didn’t go anywhere. This time, we don’t see how the dynamic is different.*”

Source: <http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/>