

# USDA Considers Transformative Proposal to Control *Salmonella* in Poultry

## Rule now under review at the White House would apply lessons learned from controlling *E coli* in ground beef to controlling *Salmonella* in poultry

Thirty years ago, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) banned *E. coli* O157:H7 from ground beef, leading to dramatic declines in *E coli* illnesses.<sup>1</sup> Now, the agency aims to take the same approach with *Salmonella*, and is poised to propose new standards that are objective, risk-based, achievable, enforceable, and flexible enough to adapt to emerging evidence and the latest science.

### *Salmonella and Poultry*

Non-typhoidal (nt-) *Salmonella* bacteria are the leading source of hospitalization and death from foodborne illness in the US,<sup>2</sup> causing approximately 1.35 million illnesses, 26,500 hospitalizations, and 420 deaths each year.<sup>3</sup> Nearly one in six of these infections (212,500 annually) exhibits antimicrobial resistance at some level.<sup>4</sup> Chicken is the leading source of *Salmonella* infection.<sup>5</sup>

In 2016, USDA adopted new performance standards requiring poultry establishments to reduce contamination,<sup>6</sup> yet illnesses from *Salmonella* have failed to decline, and currently cause 17 infections annually per 100,000 people, no change from rates in 2006-2008 (15 per 100,000).<sup>7</sup>

### *Calls for Poultry Reform*

The performance standards adopted by USDA in 2016 are narrowly focused on reducing the prevalence of *Salmonella* contamination. These standards are not adequately risk-based, since only certain serotypes of *Salmonella* are commonly associated with human illness, and the standards fail to distinguish between large amounts of *Salmonella*, which are more likely to cause infection, and minimal amounts.<sup>8</sup>

The current standards are also unenforceable, meaning slaughter establishments that violate the standards may continue to ship product into commerce.<sup>9</sup> A product can even be sold to consumers after it has been tested and is known to be positive for high levels of virulent, antibiotic-resistant *Salmonella*.

The Coalition for Poultry Safety Reform, a multistakeholder coalition that includes public health and consumer advocates, scientists, and members of the food industry, has called on

USDA to develop new standards that are objective, risk-based, achievable, enforceable, and flexible enough to adapt to emerging evidence and the latest science.<sup>10</sup>

### *Reform Actions at USDA*

In 2021, after food safety leaders called on USDA to reform its rules regulating *Salmonella*,<sup>11</sup> USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack launched a new effort to reduce *Salmonella* illnesses linked to poultry.<sup>12</sup>

USDA held a public meeting in 2022 on a proposed framework to reduce *Salmonella* infections linked to poultry products.<sup>13</sup> As part of that framework, USDA proposed declaring the highest-risk *Salmonella* contamination to be an adulterant in raw poultry, modeling the move after a similar ban on *E coli* O157:H7 in ground beef in 1994.<sup>14</sup> The ground beef ban had produced a measurable impact on illness: in the decade following the *E coli* ban, incidence of foodborne illness from *E coli* dropped by more than 40 percent.<sup>15</sup>

In 2024, USDA finalized a determination to declare *Salmonella* an adulterant for the first time ever in raw poultry, creating enforceable product standards for raw, stuffed, breaded poultry products.<sup>16</sup> This rule was narrowly focused: raw, stuffed, breaded products represent less than 0.15 percent of the total domestic chicken supply, but have an outsized impact on public health causing 5% of all chicken-associated outbreaks.<sup>17</sup>

USDA's proposed rule describing a broader *Salmonella* framework, however, remains pending at the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), since its arrival there in November 2023.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Urge OIRA to release the proposed Salmonella framework.***

*For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at [policy@cspinet.org](mailto:policy@cspinet.org).*

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<sup>1</sup> CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Vital signs: Incidence and trends of infection with pathogens transmitted commonly through food—Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, 10 U.S. Sites, 1996–2010. *Morb and Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2011;60(22):749–755.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Estimates of Foodborne Illness in the United States. Burden of Foodborne Illnesses: Findings. Last Reviewed: November 5, 2018. <https://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/2011-foodborne-estimates.html>. Accessed May 31, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States, 2019. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2019.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration. Foodborne illness source attribution estimates for 2020 for *Salmonella*, *Escherichia coli* O157, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Campylobacter* using multi-year outbreak surveillance data, United States. GA and D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, FDA, USDAFSIS; 2022.

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. New Performance Standards for Salmonella and Campylobacter in Not-Ready-to-Eat Comminuted Chicken and Turkey Products and Raw Chicken Parts and Changes to Related Agency Verification Procedures: Response to Comments and Announcement of Implementation Schedule. Fed Reg. 2016;81:7285-7300.

<sup>7</sup> Tack DM, Ray L, Griffin PM, et al. Preliminary Incidence and Trends of Infections with Pathogens Transmitted Commonly Through Food — Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, 10 U.S. Sites, 2016–2019. *Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2020; 69: 509–514.

<sup>8</sup> Sorscher, S. Petition to Establish Enforceable Standards Targeting Salmonella Types of Greatest Public Health Concern while Reducing all Salmonella and Campylobacter in Poultry, and to Require Supply Chain Controls. Center for Science in the Public Interest. 2021.

[https://www.cspinet.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource/1.25.2021\\_FSIS\\_Salmonella\\_Campylobacter\\_Petition.pdf](https://www.cspinet.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource/1.25.2021_FSIS_Salmonella_Campylobacter_Petition.pdf). Accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Letter on Poultry Safety Improvements to Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack. 2021. <https://www.afdo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Vilsack-Poultry-Meeting-Request-Letter.pdf>. Accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA Launches New Effort to Reduce Salmonella Illnesses Linked to Poultry. 2021. [www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/10/19/usda-launches-new-effort-reduce-salmonella-illnesses-linked-poultry](http://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/10/19/usda-launches-new-effort-reduce-salmonella-illnesses-linked-poultry). Accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA Releases Proposed Regulatory Framework to Reduce Salmonella Infections Linked to Poultry Products. <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/10/14/usda-releases-proposed-regulatory-framework-reduce-salmonella>. Accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. Beef Products Contaminated with Escherichia Coli O157:H7. Fed. Reg. 1999;64:2803. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1999-01-19/pdf/99-1123.pdf>. Accessed June 11, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Vital signs: Incidence and trends of infection with pathogens transmitted commonly through food—Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, 10 U.S. Sites, 1996–2010. *Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2011;60(22):749–755.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. Salmonella Not Ready-To-Eat Breaded Stuffed Chicken Products. Fed. Reg. 2024;89:35033-35053. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2024-05-01/pdf/2024-09393.pdf>. Accessed June 3, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. Regulatory Actions Currently Under Review by Agency. <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/jsp/EO/eoDashboard.myjsp>. Accessed June 3, 2024.