

All Over the Map New Legislation Addresses Gaps in Outbreak Reporting

Strengthening State outbreak reporting, and the gaps identified in *All Over the Map*, is addressed by programs included in the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act. With the new law's recent enactment, Congress has laid out a framework for improving the State-based reporting system that is so essential to identifying food and hazard combinations. "Solved outbreaks" – those in which both the food and hazard are identified – provide the best empirical data available to both the food industry and regulators on what are the most important hazards to address in food safety plans. Better surveillance would reduce the disparities in reporting between different states and allow for better targeting of food safety inspections.

The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act establishes a framework for an integrated food safety system. That framework includes:

- Instructing the CDC to improve the collection, analysis, reporting and usefulness of data on foodborne illnesses through better coordination with the States, more rapid sharing of information, and improving food attribution in the reporting of outbreaks. (Section 205)
- Instructing the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop and implement strategies for enhancing food safety and defense capacities at the State and local level to accelerate surveillance and outbreak investigations and share information more rapidly with the food industry, health care providers and the public. (Section 205)
- Naming five State health departments as **Integrated Food Safety Centers of Excellence** to serve as regional resources for State and local programs to draw on. (Section 210)
- Authorizing \$24 million a year to assist surveillance activities at the State level by coordinating Federal, State and local disease reporting systems, improving tools for identifying disease, and increasing State participation in national networks. (Section 205)

Strapped State budgets force legislatures to prioritize spending. In some States this choice results in inadequate disease surveillance and food safety oversight programs. An integrated food safety system, if properly implemented, could leverage State and Federal resources to raise the level of foodborne disease detection and protection for consumers regardless of where they live.

The information gleaned from outbreak reporting provides critical information for both the food industry and Federal inspectors on which hazards are most likely to occur in different food establishments. This allows for more targeted resource allocation.

In short, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act provides programs to address shortcomings in surveillance at the State and local level, but the effectiveness of the new law depends on Congress providing adequate funding for its implementation.