

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-00550B; FRL-6399-8]

President's Council on Food Safety; Notice of Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The President's Council on Food Safety was established in August 1998 under Executive Order 13100 to strengthen and focus our efforts to coordinate food safety policy and resources. The Council was directed to develop a comprehensive Federal food safety strategic plan. The purpose of the strategic plan is to reduce acute and chronic foodborne and waterborne illness by further enhancing the safety of the nation's food supply. 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 development of the strategic plan. USDA, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and EPA have established public dockets to receive comments about the Council's food safety strategic plan.

DATES: The meeting will be held on January 19, 2000, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Comments should be submitted by February 14, 2000.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at: The Washington Plaza Hotel, 10 Thomas Circle, Massachusetts Avenue and 14th St., Washington, DC. Comments may be submitted by mail, electronically, or in person. Please follow the detailed instructions for each method provided in Unit I.C. of the SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION. To ensure proper receipt, it is imperative that you identify the appropriate docket control number on the first page of your comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To register for this meeting or for general information, call Ms. Ida Gambrell on (202) 501-7260. Persons requiring a sign language interpreter or other special accommodations should notify Ms. Gambrell by January 7, 2000.

For technical information about the meeting, call Mr. Robert Tynan, of USDA, on (202) 205-7393 or e-mail: robert.tynan@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**I. General Information***A. Does this Public Meeting Announcement Apply to Me?*

This announcement is directed to the general public. It may, however, be of particular interest to individuals or organizations concerned with public health and food safety. Specific groups that may want to attend include, but are not limited to: Consumers, food producers, processors, transporters, distributors, and retailers, food service providers, public health professionals, academia, and State, Tribal and local public health, food safety, agricultural and environmental agencies. Other entities or individuals may also be interested in attending. The agencies have not attempted to describe all the specific entities that may be interested in attending this public meeting. If you have any questions about the public meeting, please consult the technical person listed under "FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT."

B. How Can I Get Additional Information, Including Copies of this Document or Other Related Documents?

1. *Electronically.* You may obtain electronic copies of this document and other related documents on the Internet at <http://www.foodsafety.gov/>. This website is a joint FDA, USDA, and EPA food safety homepage. It is linked to each agency for persons seeking additional food safety information. To access this document, select "President's Council on Food Safety" and under "Public Meeting on January 19, 2000 in Washington, DC," select "Federal Register Document"; this document will be the last entry under "Federal Register Documents." You can also go directly to the **Federal Register** listing at <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgrstr/>.

An expanded draft of the strategic plan, titled "Preliminary Food Safety Strategic Plan for Public Review," will also be available prior to the public meeting. You may obtain this support document and other related documents from the Internet at <http://www.foodsafety.gov/>. To access the document, select "President's Council

on Food Safety." You can also go directly to the support document at <http://www.epa.gov/opptsfrs/home/rules.htm#docket>, and scroll down to the "National Food Safety Initiative." The draft strategic plan will be available by January 7, 2000.

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

2. *By mail.* You may also obtain a copy of this document and the related draft strategic plan document by calling Ms. Gambrell at (202) 501-7260.

C. How Can I Participate?

1. *In person.* Anyone interested in food safety is encouraged to attend the public meeting. To register for the public meeting, call Ms. Gambrell at (202) 501-7260. Although registration is encouraged, walk-ins will be accommodated to the extent space permits. Persons requiring a sign language interpreter or other special accommodations should notify Ms. Gambrell by January 7, 2000.

2. *In writing.* The agencies have established public dockets for the President's Council on Food Safety Strategic Plan. Comments should be submitted by February 14, 2000. It is important that comments submitted to the dockets are 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 with their written comments in WordPerfect 6.1/8.0 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

FDA/Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305), 5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061, Rockville, MD 20852.

3. *Electronically.* Comments may also be submitted electronically to: oppts.homepage@epa.gov. All comments and data in an electronic format 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.

II. Background Information

On August 25, 1998, the President issued Executive Order 13100 establishing the Council on Food Safety and charged it to develop a 5-year comprehensive Federal food safety strategic plan and to make

recommendations to the President on how to implement the plan. A coordinated food safety strategic plan is needed to address some of the difficult public health, resource, and management questions facing Federal food safety agencies. The strategic plan will address a broad range of issues (e.g., microbial, chemical contaminants, pesticides, food additives, and physical hazards) 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.

To accomplish this task, the Council established an interagency Strategic Planning Task Force. In developing the plan, the Task Force is keeping in mind the conclusions and recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report on "Ensuring Safe Food from Production to Consumption" and the Council's report to the President on its "Assessment of the NAS Report: Ensuring Safe Food from Production to Consumption" published in March 1999. The Task Force is also considering the review of Federal food safety research developed under the auspices of the National Science and Technology Council titled "Federal Food Safety Research: Current Programs and Future Priorities" which was published in July 1999.

The food safety agencies took the first steps on the strategic plan by developing a draft vision statement and engaging consumers, producers, processors, food service providers, retailers, health professionals, State and local governments, Tribes, academia, and the public in the strategic planning process through a series of public meetings beginning in the fall of 1998. The purpose of those meetings was to obtain the public's view on a long-term vision for food safety in the U.S., to identify the important food safety challenges for the strategic plan, and to solicit public comment on the NAS report "Ensuring Safe Food from Production to Consumption." As a result of those public meetings, the vision statement has been revised and is provided below in Unit III.

In June 1999, the Council published a set of five draft food safety goals and accompanying objectives as a framework for the food safety strategic plan. Comment on those draft goals and objectives as well as suggestions for additional specific action items was

solicited at a public meeting on July 15, 1999, in Washington, DC, at stakeholder meetings that took place in conjunction with scientific or professional conferences in the last few months, and through written comments to the dockets.

Based on the many thoughtful and constructive comments received in writing and the excellent, active participation both at the July public meeting and at the meetings during scientific and professional conferences, major changes have been made to the framework and content of the strategic plan. The Council wants to engage all interested stakeholders in a further discussion about the draft goals, objectives, and action items for the U.S. food safety system as well as whether organizational or other changes would facilitate achievement of the goals.

III. Public Meeting and Request for Comment

A. Public Meeting Information

The public meeting is scheduled for January 19, 2000, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at The Washington Plaza Hotel in Washington, DC. The purpose of the meeting is to obtain the public's input on the strategic plan goals, objectives, and example action items, and to solicit suggestions for additional action items to be included in the plan. The Task Force is also interested in comments on the priorities, ways to measure progress, and mechanisms for successful implementation of the plan.

The meeting is intended to be a working meeting. It will be divided into four parts, one dealing with the proposed strategic plan framework, and one on each of the plan's three goals. The sessions will be interactive and focused around the questions provided below. Participants will be invited to raise concerns, present points of view and ask questions; members of the Council's Strategic Planning Task Force will respond and share their opinions, as appropriate. While consensus may emerge on certain points, the purpose of the meeting is to provide the government with a range of input relevant to the development of the strategic plan. Participants are strongly encouraged to read both this document and the related support document "Preliminary Food Safety Strategic Plan for Public Review" (available as provided in Unit I.B.) prior to the meeting.

A transcript of the public meeting will be posted on the Internet at: www.foodsafety.gov/. The transcripts may also be requested in writing from the Dockets Management Branch (HFA-

305), FDA, 5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061, Rockville, MD 20852, approximately 15 business days after the meeting at a cost of 10 cents per page. The transcript of the public meeting will also be available for public examination at the above-mentioned office between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays.

B. Draft Food Safety Strategic Plan for Discussion

Although the United States has one of the safest food supplies in the world, recent estimates of foodborne illness and hazards indicate that opportunities for further improvement exist. Accordingly, the Council is developing a strategy to protect public health by significantly reducing the number of foodborne illnesses and hazards. Such a strategy would aim to establish priorities on the basis of risk and to create an integrated, seamless food safety system that speaks with one voice. To define and develop focused, risk-based actions to achieve the overarching goal, the Council has developed a plan with three broad and complementary goals: Science and Risk Assessment; Risk Management; and Risk Communication. For each goal, major objectives to be addressed, along with some specific action items, have been developed. As a part of this process, the Council is also examining whether organizational, statutory, or other changes to the Federal food safety system will facilitate achievement of public health and food safety goals.

While separated for presentation purposes within the draft plan, it is essential to recognize the interdependent nature of the goals, objectives, and actions. To assure a safe food supply and protect public health, microbiological, chemical, and other public health risks posed by food must be identified and characterized with confidence. Such risks also must be assessed, prioritized, and addressed through effective science-based risk management and communication strategies. In particular, accurate and timely information must be communicated to the public.

The following synopsis outlines the strategic plan vision statement, the draft overarching goal and three supporting sub-goals, provides a listing of certain objectives and illustrative action items, and provides an overview of the initial effort to examine potential organizational options. This synopsis is intended to provide examples of the types of objectives and actions that will be included in the strategic plan document, and to stimulate thinking

and public comment about the essential components of an effective food safety strategy. The public meeting and the documents provided are intended to focus the discussion on important food safety issues and their solutions. An expanded draft of the plan will be available in January for review prior to the public meeting (see Unit I.B.); participants in the public meeting and commenters are strongly encouraged to read both this document and the preliminary strategic plan before attending the public meeting or commenting.

Following the public review and comment process, the strategic plan will be refined. The final plan will include evaluation strategies to determine whether public health goals are met, and whether mid-course corrections to the plan are needed. Mechanisms for measuring progress and public health impact of the strategic plan will be developed in each goal area. The plan will also include an examination of whether organizational, statutory, or other changes can contribute to implementation of the plan and achievement of the goals.

1. *Vision, goals, objectives and action items.*

Vision Statement

Consumers can be confident that food is safe. We protect public health through a seamless food safety system that uses farm-to-table preventive strategies and integrates research, surveillance, inspection, enforcement, and education. We use science- and risk-based approaches and work with public and private partners. We are vigilant to new and emergent threats and consider the needs of vulnerable populations. Food is safe because everyone understands and fulfills their responsibilities.

Overarching Goal

To protect public health by significantly reducing the number of foodborne illnesses and hazards through science-based and coordinated regulation, inspection, enforcement, research, and education programs.

Sound Science and Risk Assessment

Goal: The United States food safety system is based on sound science and risk assessment.

Draft objectives: The Sound Science and Risk Assessment Goal includes, but might not be limited to, the following objectives.

- Develop and implement a unified, risk-based problem-solving research agenda.
- Identify emerging and potential high-risk food safety threats.
- Strengthen the scientific basis for food safety policies and regulatory decisions through rigorous assessments of risk.

- Enhance scientific infrastructure and skills at Federal, state, and local levels.

Possible action items: Examples of action items to achieve the above objectives include the following.

- Use risk assessment techniques to identify priorities for the research agenda.
- Support the development of rapid tests for pathogenic microorganisms and chemical agents in food and clinical specimens.
- Establish a national network of scientific experts that can be mobilized when a new food safety concern is identified.

• Establish extramural Centers of Excellence to conduct targeted research and develop training programs linked to food safety and public health.

Risk Management Goal: The United States system for managing food safety is effective from farm-to-table.

Draft objectives: The Risk Management Goal includes, but might not be limited to, the following objectives.

- Establish national risk-based standards to control food safety risks.
- Develop and promote preventive techniques and controls based on national standards, and require implementation where appropriate.
- Use non-regulatory approaches for improving food safety.
- Detect food safety risks and violations of food safety standards through monitoring, inspections, and comprehensive surveys.
- Protect the food supply through consistent enforcement of food safety laws.
- Expand and enhance effective surveillance of illness and other health effects resulting from food safety hazards.

• Respond rapidly and effectively to food safety emergencies.

• Implement food safety activities effectively in partnership with state and local governments.

• Implement a strategy to ensure the safety of imported food.

Possible action items: Illustrative action items for the above Risk Management objectives are provided below.

- Develop and use incentive programs to improve food safety (e.g., preferential entry into Federal programs, such as the school lunch program).
- Upgrade the ability at all levels (Federal, state and local) to conduct public health surveillance, laboratory diagnostics, and emergency response.
- Expand capacity to monitor and inspect for pesticides and other chemical contaminants in food at critical points to decrease food safety risks.

• Improve and expand risk-based port-of-entry inspection that focuses on chemical, microbial, and physical hazards and labeling issues that promote public health.

• Identify state and local standards and regulations that should be applied within national standards.

• Strengthen surveillance of foodborne illness and hazards to prevent outbreaks.

• Expedite review for new technologies that decrease human pathogens that are present in food.

• Encourage development and expedite licensing of new technologies and safer pesticide products.

• Promote additional voluntary "best practices" and quality assurance programs to reduce risk of illness.

• Develop a network of animal diagnostic laboratories to enhance systematic monitoring in animal feeds and feedstuffs for microbial, chemical, and other hazards that pose a food safety risk.

Risk Communication Goal: The United States food safety system openly and effectively provides information on food safety risks, and education on how to control those risks.

Draft objectives: The Risk Communication Goal includes, but is not necessary limited to, the following objectives.

• Sustain public confidence through effective, open and timely information exchange regarding food safety risks and prevention strategies.

• Establish active outreach strategies to provide rapid public access to information about food safety emergencies.

• Develop and apply state-of-the-art science-based education and training programs for all along the farm-to-table chain, focused on actions to reduce foodborne illness and hazards.

Possible action items: Illustrative action items for the above Risk Communication objectives are provided below.

• Create a state-of-the-art national information network that links Federal food safety agencies (USDA, HHS, and EPA) with state and local public health, food safety, agricultural, and environmental agencies.

• Develop consistent and coordinated food safety messages and programs.

• Establish opportunities for public/private partnerships to promote effective communication about food safety risks.

• Launch a national public information/education campaign to widely disseminate food safety messages in multiple formats and languages.

2. *Strategic plan implementation.* As indicated in the President's Council on

Food Safety "Assessment of the NAS Report: Ensuring Safe Food from Production to Consumption," the Council, as part of the strategic plan process, is conducting a thorough review of existing statutes to determine what can be accomplished with existing regulatory flexibility and what improvements will require statutory changes. The Council also is conducting an assessment of structural and organizational options and other mechanisms that could strengthen the Federal food safety system, keeping in mind that the primary goal is food safety and public health.

In this connection, the Strategic Planning Task Force is considering whether organizational or other changes would strengthen the current food safety system and facilitate the achievement of the public health and food safety goals of the strategic plan. Organizational changes under review include strengthening coordination and leadership; streamlining and/or consolidating specific Federal food safety functions; consolidating responsibilities and the structure of current agencies; and establishing a new, stand-alone consolidated food safety agency. Criteria for evaluating each of these options include the potential to improve public health and food safety, and to facilitate effectiveness, efficiency, comprehensiveness, public confidence,

and the science-base for the food safety system. Options also will be assessed for their potential to contribute to achieving the overarching and three specific strategic plan goals.

For further information, the reader is encouraged to review the organizational analysis section in the support document which will be available as described in Unit I.B.

C. Questions/Issues for Discussion

The agencies are particularly interested in comments on the following issues related to the strategic plan. These questions will be the starting point for discussion at the public meeting sessions on the overall framework for the plan, and on the three goals.

General/Cross-cutting Question:

1. Is the overarching goal and overall framework of the plan well-focused and comprehensive? What modifications would you suggest? What issue or concern would your modification address?

Questions to be Posed for Each Goal:

1. What additional objectives or specific action steps would improve the plan? What issue or concern would these address?

2. What objectives and action items should be given priority? Why?

3. What is your expectation of success? How do we measure success of the plan?

4. Are there organizational, statutory, or other changes that you suggest we consider to achieve this goal? How would these changes promote public health and food safety? What barriers would need to be addressed?

List of Subjects

Environmental protection, Food safety.

Dated: December 8, 1999.

Catherine E. Woteki,

Under Secretary for Food Safety, United States Department of Agriculture.

Dated: December 8, 1999.

Jane E. Henney,

Commissioner of Food and Drugs, Department of Health and Human Services.

Dated: December 7, 1999.

Martha Katz,

Deputy Director for Policy and Legislation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services.

Dated: December 8, 1999.

Susan H. Wayland,

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

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