

Memorandum on the Joint Institute for Food Safety Research July 3, 1998

Memorandum for the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Agriculture
Subject: Joint Institute for Food Safety Research

Americans enjoy the most bountiful and safe food supply in the world. My Administration has made substantial improvements in the food safety system, from modernizing meat, seafood, and poultry inspections to creating a high-tech early warning system to detect and control outbreaks of foodborne illness.

Our success has been built on two guiding principles: (1) engaging all concerned parties including consumers, farmers, industry, and academia, in an open and far-ranging dialogue about improving food safety; and (2) grounding our efforts in the best science available. We have made progress, but more can be done to prevent the many foodborne illnesses that still occur in our country.

As we look to the future of food safety, science and technology will play an increasingly central role. An expanded food safety research agenda is essential to continued improvements in the safety of America's food. We need new tools to detect more quickly dangerous pathogens, like *E. coli* O157:H7 and campylobacter, and we need better interventions that reduce the risk of contamination during food production.

Food safety research is a critical piece of my Fiscal Year 1999 food safety initiative; and I have urged the Congress to revise the appropriations bills it currently is considering to provide full funding for this initiative. I also have urged the Congress to pass two critical pieces of legislation to bring our food safety system into the 21st century: (1) legislation ensuring that the Food and Drug Administration halts imports of fruits, vegetables, and other food products that come from countries that do not meet U.S. food safety requirements or that do not provide the same level of protection as is required for U.S. products; and (2) legislation giving the Department of Agriculture the authority to impose civil penalties for violations of meat and poultry regu-

lations and to issue mandatory recalls to remove unsafe meat and poultry from the marketplace.

At the same time, we need to make every effort to maximize our current resources and authorities. One very important way to achieve this objective is to improve and coordinate food safety research activities across the Federal Government, with State and local governments, and the private sector. Solid research can and will help us to identify foodborne hazards more rapidly and accurately, and to develop more effective intervention mechanisms to prevent food contamination.

I therefore direct you to report back to me within 90 days on the creation of a Joint Institute for Food Safety Research that will: (1) develop a strategic plan for conducting food safety research activities consistent with my Food Safety Initiative; and (2) efficiently coordinate all Federal food safety research, including with the private sector and academia. This Institute, which will operate under your joint leadership, should cooperate and consult with all interested parties, including other Federal agencies and offices—particularly, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Partnership for Reinventing Government, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy—State and local agencies focusing on research and public health, and on consumers, producers, industry, and academia. The Institute should make special efforts to build on efforts of the private sector, through the use of public-private partnerships or other appropriate mechanisms.

These steps, taken together and in coordination with our pending legislation, will ensure to the fullest extent possible the safety of food for all of America's families.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: This memorandum was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 3 but was embargoed for release until 10:06 a.m. on July 4.