

# *Federal Actions Impacting Animal and Meat Sciences*

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Ensuring consumer confidence in the U.S. food supply continues to be a top priority for the federal government. President Clinton established the President's Council on Food Safety headed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Health and Human Services and by the Assistant to the President for Science and Technology in August 1998. About the same time, the National Academy of Sciences issued a report which recommended that the federal government adopt a science-based approach to food safety and that a unified framework be established to coordinate all federal food safety activities. Congress appropriated an additional \$51.9 million to promote research, inspection, prevention, and response activities of USDA and FDA agencies during the 1999 fiscal year.

While no significant bills intending to curb foodborne disease were passed in the last Congress, several bills have already been proposed in this first session of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress. Passage of S. 18, S. 48, or H.R. 983 would encourage reporting of food safety violations and grant recall authority to the Secretary of Agriculture. H.R. 765 was proposed to expand poultry inspection to include the order *Ratitae* (ostriches, emus, or rheas) intended for human consumption. A single food agency bill will be proposed. An amendment to implement meat inspection using Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) may be deemed necessary if the current statute of "carcass by carcass" inspection is interpreted literally. Top priorities for research funding include development of tests to identify microbial adulterants and management schemes to reduce risks of contamination on farms and during slaughter, processing, packaging, storage, and transport processes. USDA is in the process of developing guidelines for industry application of irradiation to meat and poultry.

Other issues concern the integrity of the U.S. food supply. Senators Frist and Kennedy are holding hearings regarding causes and prevalence of antibiotic resistant microbes. Currently, FDA is revising guidelines on antibiotic use in meat

and egg production. The House Agriculture Subcommittee on Risk Management, Research, and Specialty Crops is holding hearings regarding approval, regulation, trade issues, and safety involved with the production of genetically modified foods. FDA oversight of "nutraceuticals" or dietary supplements may be changed as consumption increases.

Bills intending to promote competitiveness of U.S. Agricultural products in international markets include country of origin labeling of meat (S. 242, H.R. 222); denying the U.S. quality grade label on imported meats (S. 241); and enforcing fair Agricultural trade practices (S. 101, H.R. 450, H.R. 817). H.R. 169, H.R. 693, and S. 19 were introduced to improve domestic market transparency by requiring reporting of prices, sales, and volume by meat packers. Future bills and funding appropriations further promoting food safety and producer financial status may be expected, but may increase regulation of industry and larger Agricultural operations.

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