

Standardized Sampling and Testing Procedures for E. coli O157:H7 in Fresh and Frozen Beef Raw Materials

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In 1994, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service established a policy which defines the presence of *E. coli* O157:H7 as an adulterant in ground beef. However, there are no effective critical control points which will prevent or eliminate *E. coli* O157:H7 from raw ground beef if it is present in raw materials. Therefore, prevention and control must occur during the slaughter process, where validated pathogen reduction interventions have been identified.

Recently, USDA published a directive (10,010.1) which establishes a framework of industry testing for *E. coli* O157:H7 and which effectively exempts establishments from routine USDA monitoring for *E. coli* O157:H7 if certain conditions are met. The framework is based on control of *E. coli* O157:H7 during the slaughter process through the application of validated pathogen reduction interventions and routine verification of control through *E. coli* O157:H7 testing of carcasses, boneless beef, and raw ground beef products.

In addition, there has been a strong interest in the testing of raw materials by end-users, including both retailers and restaurants. As a result, a large number of sampling and testing protocols have proliferated. Each of these programs differ in regards to sampling and testing procedures, and therefore, the industry faces the difficult task of coordinating a multitude of sampling and testing requirements.

In order to meet the requirements set forth in the USDA directive on microbiological testing for *E. coli* O157:H7 and customer requirements for testing of raw materials, an initiative was taken on behalf of the beef industry to develop a standardized sampling and testing program for *E. coli* O157:H7 in fresh and frozen beef raw materials which would be statistically equivalent to existing programs.

This reciprocation session will address the status of the industry initiative and its relationship to USDA's microbiological testing program for *E. coli* O157:H7 in raw ground

beef.

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