

SAFE FOOD COALITION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW USDA STANDARDS FOR POULTRY PARTS WILL IMPROVE FOOD SAFETY BUT STILL LEAVE CONSUMERS VULNERABLE

*Consumers will Benefit from More Accurate, Frequent, and Transparent Testing
But Further Steps Needed to Rein in Salmonella*

Washington D.C. — Members of the Safe Food Coalition today commended the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s release of final standards for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in ground poultry and poultry parts. According to USDA’s Food Safety Inspection Service, the new standards will help prevent 50,000 illnesses annually. The Coalition also called on USDA to build on these standards by taking a tougher stance overall on the presence of drug-resistant *Salmonella* in food, and to conduct a thorough review of its microbial sampling methods to ensure that industry processing techniques do not hamper the agency's ability to detect *Salmonella*.

“These new standards are a welcome step that will better protect the public from dangerous foodborne illness,” said the groups. “*Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* cause millions of illnesses every year, yet progress on reducing the number of infections has been stalled for over a decade. These standards will help to address an antiquated testing protocol and shine a light on companies that need to clean up their act.”

Under a 1996 regulation, FSIS sets and periodically ratchets down upper limits on the amount of pathogen contamination allowed in meat and poultry products. Until now, however, the agency has assessed *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* contamination in poultry on the basis of whole chicken carcasses. Recent testing by the agency has shown that the level of contamination in poultry parts may be higher than in whole carcasses because of cross-contamination that occurs in the evisceration process. Independent testing by *Consumer Reports* has confirmed high incidence rates of *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in chicken breasts. The new performance standards apply to parts, the form of poultry most commonly purchased by consumers.

Under the new standards, FSIS will conduct a follow-up investigation of an establishment with large numbers of positive samples, but not necessarily demand that the company recall contaminated product. “Unfortunately, these new standards leave an important loophole in place,” the Safe Food Coalition said. “We continue to urge FSIS to declare certain antibiotic resistant serotypes of *Salmonella* to be adulterants, as the Center for Science in the Public Interest asked the agency to do in the petition it first filed in May 2011, and refiled in October 2014. The Coalition also supports the ‘Pathogen Reduction and Testing Reform Act of 2015,’

legislation introduced by U.S. Representatives Rosa DeLauro and Louise Slaughter, which would direct the Secretary to declare such dangerous pathogens adulterants.”

The Safe Food Coalition also cautioned that any standard will only be as reliable as the testing to measure compliance. It urged the agency to address concerns that chemical interventions used by poultry plants may interfere with FSIS’ detection of pathogens. “FSIS must ensure that its testing is accurate and reliable for all plants, regardless of the chemicals used when processing the birds,” the group said.

“The standards released today are a step in the right direction,” said the group. “By focusing on parts, they will offer more targeted protection to consumers. The new standards also improve on the status quo by increasing the frequency of sampling and publishing poultry plants’ performance. Before, FSIS published the identities of worst performers on its website, but under the new standards, consumers will be able to see information about all poultry plants and which of three categories they fall into.”

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The Safe Food Coalition is made up of consumer groups, public health groups, groups representing victims of foodborne illness, and labor organizations dedicated to reducing the burden of foodborne illness in the United States by improving government food inspection programs.

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