

# Modernizing America's Food Safety System: The Problem and Solutions



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# The Food Safety Problem

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- **Annual toll of foodborne illness**
  - 5,000 deaths
  - 325,000 hospitalizations
- **Erosion of public confidence**
  - Affecting well-being
  - Affecting food choices
- **Big economic and trade impacts**



# Why Food Safety Is Hard and Requires an Adaptable System

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- **Vastness and diversity of the food system** -- a trillion dollar share of the economy
- **Complexity of causation and prevention**
  - Multiple causative factors for most illnesses
  - Multiple opportunities for prevention
- **Rapid change in the food supply**
  - Evolving pathogens
  - New technology
  - Changing consumer demand and behavior
  - Expanding and diversifying imports



# Complexity of the System: It's Not Just Government

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- **Private sector**

- Producers
- Processors
- Retailers/Food Service

- **Public sector**

- Multiple federal agencies – FDA, USDA, EPA, CDC
- State health and agriculture departments
- Local health departments and sanitarians

- **Complex web of interactions**

- Among federal, state, and local agencies
- Between public and private sectors



# The FDA Role

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- **Covers 80% of the food supply**, including nearly all imports
- **Operates under 1938 law** that provides tools for reacting but no mandate for prevention
- **Authorized to inspect but no requirement** – has about 1,850 field personnel for 139,000 domestic and 189,000 foreign establishments
- **Limited to port of entry inspection for imports**
- **Budget in the range of \$500 million**



# The USDA Role

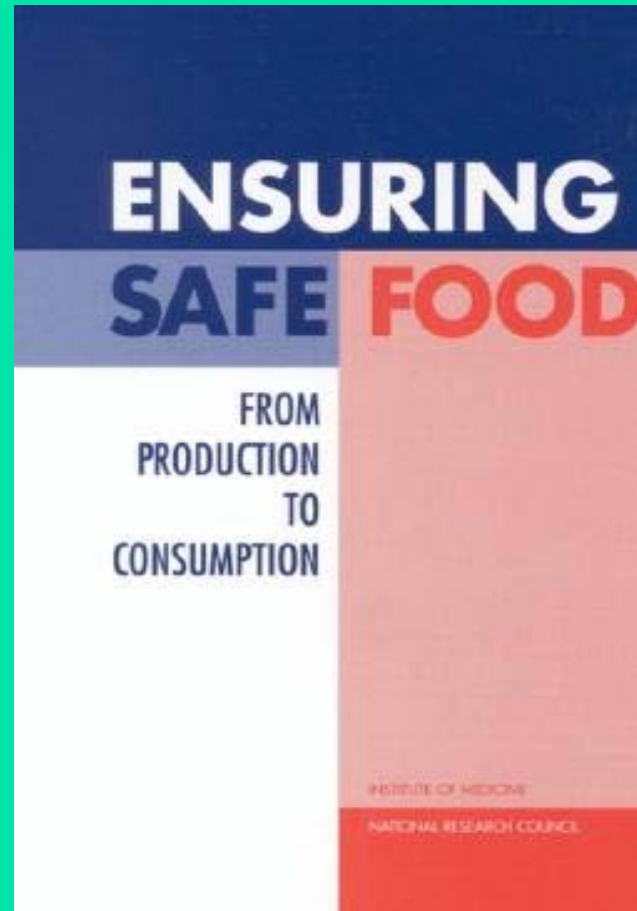
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- **Covers 20% of the food supply** – meat and poultry and some egg products
- **Operates under 1906 and 1960's laws** that mandate carcass-by-carcass and daily inspection
- **Has about 7,800 inspectors for 6,200 establishments**
- **Approves foreign inspection systems and plants** exporting to the United States
- **Budget in the range of \$1 billion**



# 1998 IOM Report

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# Key Problems With the Current Federal Role

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- **Obsolete statutes**
  - FDA law focuses on reaction rather than prevention
  - USDA laws tie USDA's hands to obsolete practices
  - Overall lack of a modern systems approach
- **Fragmented structure**
  - FDA, USDA, and EPA share regulatory jurisdiction
  - FDA fragmented internally with foods taking back seat
  - No focal point for leadership on research and information sharing
- **Poor use of inadequate resources**
  - FDA chronically underfunded
  - Wasteful USDA inspection system
  - Broad inefficiency in inducing prevention





# Key Elements of the Solution

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- **Take an integrated systems approach** that is adaptable and risk-based
- **Focus on prevention** as the basic duty of industry and government
- **Set food safety standards** as measure of accountability for performance on prevention
- **Inspect and enforce** to ensure standards are met
- **Drive generation and dissemination of knowledge** across public and private sectors
- **Provide leadership** nationally and internationally



# Questions

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