

Food Safety Education

...Improving Public Health

A New Era for Food Safety Education

The Food Safety Education (FSE) staff of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) develops consumer education programs for the public and operates the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, a toll-free nationwide service staffed by food safety experts.

The FSE staff provides information and educational materials designed to foster safe food handling. The goal of the FSE staff is to reduce foodborne illness by providing consumers with the information they need to safely handle meat, poultry,

and egg products. The staff builds on extensive experience in food safety education: FSIS has been producing consumer education programs for more than two decades.

Today, the FSE staff is playing an integral role in the development of a new generation of educational programs. These programs are unique in a number of ways.

- ▶ Communication projects and educational campaigns are solidly **based on science**, drawn from epidemiological

studies concerning foods and behaviors that contribute to food safety risks.

- ▶ Projects are developed **based on social marketing principles** and are derived from educational theory, market and consumer research, and focus group testing.
- ▶ Food safety education programs are **delivered through partnerships**, including other Federal agencies, the food industry, consumer groups, academia, and public health organizations.

Based on Science

The safe handling advice provided to consumers from the FSE educational campaigns and the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline is based on the latest scientific information available.

For example, new scientific research revealed that color of meat was not a reliable indica-

tor that meat had been cooked to a safe internal temperature. That research was the foundation of a new consumer education campaign designed to encourage consumers to use food thermometers.

FSE education campaigns are based on a variety of scientific sources, including new epi-

demiological information drawn from foodborne disease surveillance conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Data sources such as this help identify types of foods associated with illness, behaviors that can contribute to disease, and populations that are more susceptible to illness.

Based on Social Marketing Principles

FSE educational programs are based on sound educational theory and social marketing research.

While the FSE staff are public health educators and not selling breakfast cereal or new cars, we use similar marketing skills to understand consumers' knowledge of foodborne illness, the barriers to changing risky behaviors, and the best methods for communicating. Some of the issues we examine: What consumers tell us about what they need to know, how they would like to learn this information, and what barrier might be prevent-

ing them from changing potentially harmful behaviors.

Before any new educational campaign is launched, prototype materials are pretested with consumer focus groups. Pretesting provides vital information about how well the target audiences understand the materials and provides the opportunity to tailor information to specific audience needs. By listening to consumers, we develop education programs that work for consumers. (See FSIS consumer research: www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/research/research.htm)

Delivered Through Partnerships

Partnerships are key to the delivery of food safety education programs today. These partnerships are varied and can include Federal partners, industry groups and organizations, food producers, consumer groups, public health officials, and State and local offices.

Two prime examples of these partnerships: the Partnership for Food Safety Education, a national coalition of industry, consumer, and government groups; and the USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center (www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne) which provides a comprehensive database of food safety education materials produced by government, industry, academia, and others.

Educational Tools

Educational campaigns and programs utilize a variety of tools to reach consumers:

- ▶ The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline;
- ▶ Media campaigns with press events, reproducible information packets and public service announcements (in Spanish and English), and follow-up media tours;
- ▶ Educational videotapes and curricula;
- ▶ Satellite video teleconferences, including videostreaming via the Web;
- ▶ Publications, brochures, fact sheets (in Spanish and English);
- ▶ A quarterly newsletter titled *The Food Safety Educator* distributed to educators nationwide and available on through the FSIS Web site;
- ▶ A monthly electronic newsletter, EdNet, distributed to food safety educators; and
- ▶ Web-based consumer information:
www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/pubs/consumerpubs.htm

Partnership for Food Safety Education's Fight BAC!™ Campaign

The Fight BAC!™ campaign is the product of a national coalition of industry and consumer groups, along with Federal agency liaisons, called the Partnership for Food Safety Education. Organized in 1997, the Partnership teams the best efforts of all food safety educators at every level: food production; food retail; industry organizations; public health; consumer groups; as well as Federal, State and local government groups.

The FSE staff was a founding cooperator with the Partnership and has been integrally involved in the Partnership's development and the nationally recognized Fight BAC!™ campaign.

The Fight BAC!™ campaign is a one-of-a-kind national food safety education campaign that centers around four consistent, science-based messages about safe food handling. The messages were developed after scientific consensus, market testing, and work with consumer focus groups. They are summarized as: clean, separate, cook, and chill. All educational materials for the Fight BAC!™ campaign use these four messages as key reinforcing points.



Since 1997, these four key messages of the Fight BAC!™ campaign have become the cornerstone of food safety education programs in this country as well as internationally. These consistent and clear messages allow multiple partners to speak with one voice, but to present the information in a multitude of ways to thousands of different audiences.



Support for these four Fight BAC!™ messages is evidenced by their inclusion in major Federal food safety policy. Healthy People 2010 is a national health promotion and disease prevention program that brings together partners in every level of government and society for the purpose of improving public health. The four Fight BAC!™ messages are now part of that initiative. For the first time, *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans* now

includes a guideline about food safety. That guideline is based on the four Fight BAC!™ messages.

The FSE staff has worked hands-on with the Partnership to develop educational materials that educators around the country can use, reproduce and adapt for their own use. The campaign is supported by an impressive variety of “tools” ranging from the 8-foot-tall Fight BAC!™ costumed mes-

senger to a basic brochure, curricula and video programs, games for kids, magnets, posters, mugs, reproducible artwork, materials in foreign languages, and animated public service announcements.

Many of these materials are free, but some can also be purchased through a unique on-line “store.” All materials are available through: www.fightbac.org

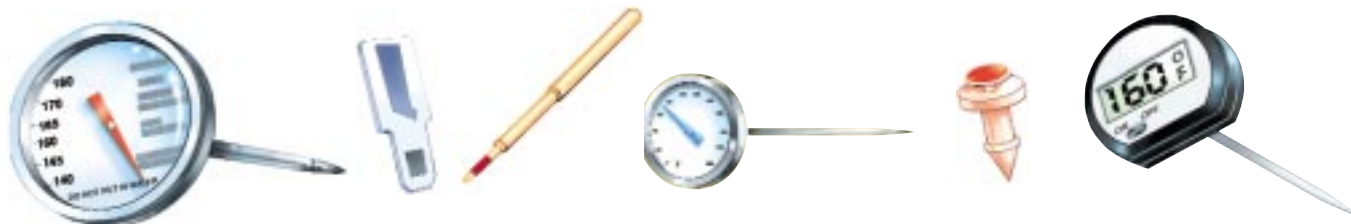
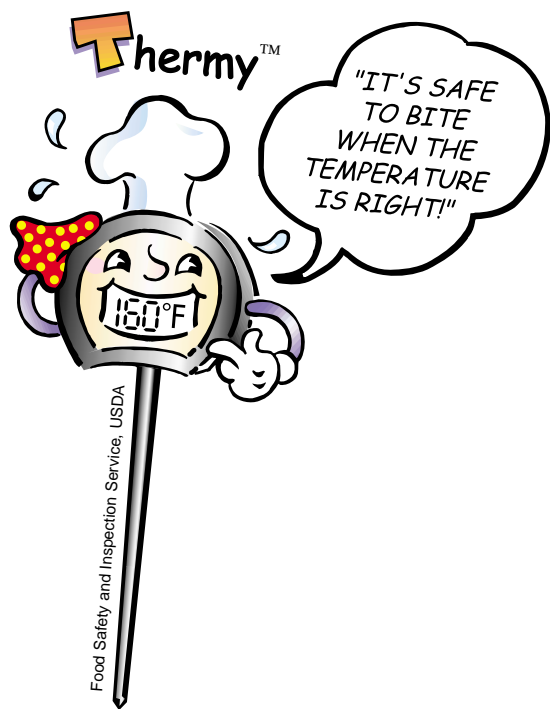
Thermometer Educational Campaign

This national consumer education campaign is designed to promote food thermometer use. Supporting the Fight BAC!™ message of “cook,” this campaign is based on studies showing significant risk for foodborne illness when color is used to judge when food has been cooked to a safe temperature.

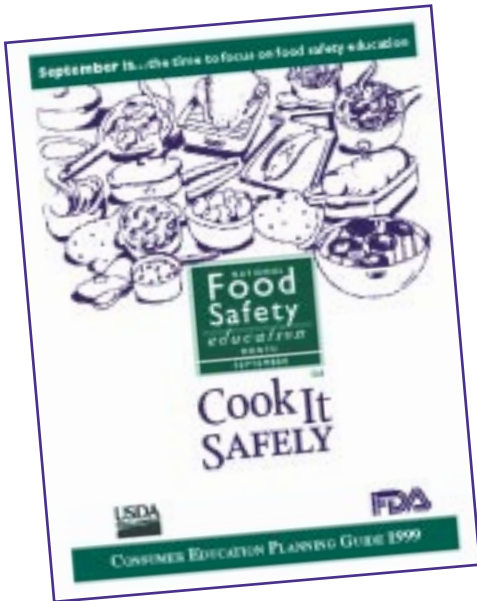
The FSE staff launched this campaign recognizing that, as the experts said, “thermometer use is a tough sell.” Employing the best of social marketing concepts, the FSE staff used focus group feedback to devel-

op the program, educational materials (in Spanish and English), the slogan, and the FSIS messenger—Thermy™.

Using partnerships, FSE teamed with the thermometer industry and retail grocery stores across the country to teach consumers the importance of using food thermometers. Grocery stores across the country have used Thermy™ materials for their own in-store promotions and educational programs. Thermy™ was even featured, along with the Fight BAC!™ character, in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in 2000.



National Food Safety Education Month^(SM)



The FSE staff work in cooperation with other Federal agencies and the food industry to develop reproducible packets of materials for consumer edu-



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cators each September for National Food Safety Education Month^(SM). Coordinating with the Fight BAC!TM campaign, themes over the past several years have focused on providing information on one of the four Fight BAC!TM messages.

Campaigns for Targeted Audiences

The FSE staff also develops educational materials targeted to a variety of audiences, including people facing special risks from foodborne illness (seniors, pregnant women and young children, and people with weakened immune systems). Examples of the educational campaigns include:

- ▶ A video and accompanying publication for seniors,
- ▶ A publication for volunteers cooking for groups,
- ▶ A food safety coloring book for kids,
- ▶ A publication highlighting the risks for at-risk groups from a foodborne pathogen called *Listeria monocytogenes*,
- ▶ A video program for pregnant teenagers, and
- ▶ A food safety guide for day care providers.



A Meat and Poultry Hotline

In addition to food safety education campaigns, a key component of the agency's educational program is the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline (1-800-535-4555).

The nationally known USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline reaches out to individual consumers, providing guidance and answers to their questions, whether it's tips for safe food handling, information on recalls, or background on food-borne disease.

Staffed by home economists, registered dietitians, and food technologists, the Hotline has been providing toll-free national service for over 15 years.

A unique aspect to the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline is that in addition to handling questions from individual consumers, the Hotline is a nationally recognized source of information about food and food safety. Media representatives from magazines to national and local radio and television talk shows keep the Hotline number on their "must call" list to update food safety information throughout the year.



**USDA Meat and
Poultry Hotline**
(800) 535-4555

As a result of its media presence, and articles and news stories it helps to generate, the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline reaches millions of consumers every year with food safety information. The Hotline is also accessible to consumers through e-mail (mpholine.fsis@usda.gov) and the Internet (www.fsis.usda.gov).

Recorded food safety messages are now provided to consumers 24 hours a day. There is also a separate telephone number for people who are hearing impaired, (TTY) 1-800-256-7072.

The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline also serves as an "early warning" system. When

consumers are concerned or confused about certain food safety issues, the Hotline is often the first to know. That feedback and information is critical in the development of the agency's food safety education campaigns and well as its food safety policies.

How To Keep in Touch With Food Safety Education Information

The Food Safety Educator

This free quarterly newsletter reports on new food safety educational programs and materials as well as emerging science concerning food safety risks. It is distributed to nearly 10,000 educators throughout the country including public health offices, extension educators, industry, and consumer groups.

To subscribe: provide your full name, organization name & mailing address.

- ▶ Write to: USDA/FSIS/Food Safety Education, Room 2944-South Building, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-3700
- ▶ Or fax your request to: (202) 720-9063
- ▶ Or e-mail your request to: fsis.outreach@usda.gov
- ▶ The newsletter is also available on the FSIS Web site: www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/educator/educator.htm



On the Web

- ▶ USDA/Food Safety and Inspection Service
www.fsis.usda.gov
- ▶ Thermy™ Web page
www.fsis.usda.gov/thermy
- ▶ Fight BAC!™
www.fightbac.org
- ▶ Gateway to Government Food Safety Information
www.foodsafety.gov
- ▶ FDA/Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
www.cfsan.fda.gov
- ▶ USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center
www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne
- ▶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/foodsafety

EdNet—a monthly electronic newsletter for food safety educators. To subscribe, send an e-mail message to: Listserv@foodsafety.gov
Send the message:
Subscribe EDNET-L
firstname lastname

foodsafe—an online electronic discussion group. To join, go to: www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne

Other Resources

Toll-free—USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline
1-800-535-4555,
for the hearing-impaired
(TTY) **1-800-256-7072**

Food and Drug Administration's Outreach and Information Center
1-888-SAFEFOOD

Use A Food Thermometer



FSIS

**Food Safety
and Inspection Service**

U.S. Department of Agriculture

"IT'S SAFE
TO BITE
WHEN THE
TEMPERATURE
IS RIGHT!"

Temperature Rules!

... for cooking foods at home.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 140 °F • Ham, fully-cooked (to reheat) | 165 °F • Ground turkey & chicken |
| 145 °F • Beef, lamb & veal steaks & roasts, (medium rare) | • Stuffing |
| 160 °F • Hamburger, meatloaf & other ground meats, | • Casseroles (Mixed dishes) |
| • Beef, lamb & veal steaks & roasts (medium) | • Leftovers |
| • Pork chops, ribs & roasts | 170 °F • Chicken & turkey breasts |
| • Egg dishes | 180 °F • Chicken & turkey whole bird, legs, thighs & wings |
| | • Duck & Goose |

It's the only way to tell if your food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy harmful bacteria.

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
1-800-535-4555
www.fsis.usda.gov/thermy

United States Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service
Food Safety Education Staff
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250-3700

Phone: (202) 720-7943
Fax: (202) 720-1843

e-mail: fsis.outreach@usda.gov
Web site: www.fsis.usda.gov

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