

■ New USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety



Dr. Elsa A. Murano was sworn in as under secretary for food safety by Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman on October 2, 2001.

In this position, Murano oversees the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

A supporter of food safety education—including the Fight BAC!™ campaign—Dr. Murano has extensive public and private experience in the field of food safety as both a manager and educator.

During the past 6 years, Dr. Murano held several positions with Texas A&M University at College Station, Texas.

Most recently she served as the director of the university's Center for Food Safety. During this time she also served on the university's

Department of Animal Science Research Advisory Committee and the Food Safety Response Team of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

In her statement to Congress, Dr. Murano noted that she is a native of Havana, Cuba. Her family settled first in Puerto Rico and then Miami.

Dr. Murano graduated with a B.S. in Biology from Florida International University.

"I developed a deep interest in the medical field and in public health, which guided me to earn an M.S. degree in Anaerobic Microbiology and a Ph.D. in Food Science from Virginia Tech.

As a researcher and teacher in the field of food safety, Dr. Murano noted that her research led her "to investigate organisms like *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Salmonella*, all the bad actors that have become household words. My approach in this work has been to determine where these pathogens are found, and to investigate safe methods that can be used to control or eliminate them from farm to table."

Noting the importance of sound science in making decisions, Dr. Murano added that "I have also observed the need for a proactive approach, one that does not react to food safety crises but rather anticipates risks.

"The events of September 11th are a reminder to all of us that we need to be diligent in order to prevent threats to our food supply as much as humanly possible"

Concluding, Dr. Murano said, "We're all in this together, government (and I mean not only those in USDA, but all other agencies that play a role in food safety), consumers, industry, educators, and scientists. It is only through a team approach, working in total transparency, and standing on the truth of science that we will accomplish our goal for America of having the safest food supply possible." •

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"I also developed an appreciation for the field of food microbiology, and decided to dedicate my life to the study of bacteria, which, although microscopic, are capable of causing so many cases of foodborne illness each year in our country and throughout the world."

*"...we will accomplish our goal
for America of having the
safest food supply possible."*

—Dr. Elsa A. Murano

■ The Three “R’s”

Responsive, Rigorous, Respect

Addressing the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) in November 2001, Dr. Elsa Murano identified the three operating principles of her administration. The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), she said, “will be responsive, it will be rigorous, and it will strive to earn the respect of our stakeholders.”

Responsive

“In being responsive, Dr. Murano sees the agency as open and listening to stakeholders, continuing to hold public hearings, and seeking the public’s input.”

The other way the agency will be responsive, she said, is by addressing emerging food safety hazards quickly, pointing out that the agency is now better able to identify emerging hazards through better surveillance systems as well as improved inspection systems.

Rigorous

Science is the only foundation for effective food safety policy, according to Dr. Murano. “I am open to new solutions, new ways of doing business, but only if they stand on the firm foundation of science.” Dr. Murano sees four keys to science-based decision making:

- risk assessments—These are the tools that allow policy makers to identify hazards and provide a basis for making risk management decisions. “The analyses we make must be complete, and the models that are generated must stand the rigor of the peer-review process,” she said.

- expert advisory committees—The agency will continue to seek expert advice through two advisory committees, the National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection and the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods.

- FSIS laboratories—“Our laboratories contribute greatly to our science-based approach,” Dr. Murano said. “They must be second to none in terms of their ability to meet emerging challenges.” All three FSIS laboratories are expected to be certified by the International Organization for Standardization by the end of 2001.

- open to novel technologies—“We must also encourage the application of novel technologies to food safety,” Dr. Murano said, noting that irradiation has proven very effective against conventional foodborne illness. It needs to be considered, along with other innovative methods of decontamination.

Respect

“We must work to deserve this label,” Dr. Murano said, “by ensuring that we make our decisions through an open, transparent process that includes all stakeholders.”

“I challenge you to grade us on these 3 “R’s” as we work together.”

To read the complete speech, go to: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/speeches/speeches.htm> •

Keeping America’s Food and Agriculture Safe

Safeguarding American agriculture—and food—is one of the nation’s highest priorities. Everyone, from the highest levels of government to food growers, producers, and foodservice, is paying new attention to security issues.

In her November speech to FMI, Dr. Murano addressed bioterrorism. “A strong food safety infrastructure,” she said, “with systems in place to prevent contamination, can address hazards, regardless of how they are introduced.” FSIS, she added, “has a long history of dealing with food emergencies, and this experience will serve the agency well.”

To access the latest federal information regarding “biosecurity,” go to: <http://www.usda.gov/special/biosecurity/safeguard.htm> •

