

JOINT INTRODUCTION

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are pleased to jointly announce the publication of the 1999 edition of the Food Code. The Food Code is a reference document for regulatory agencies responsible for overseeing food safety in retail outlets such as restaurants and grocery stores and institutions such as nursing homes and child care centers. It is neither federal law nor federal regulation and is not preemptive, but may be adopted and used by agencies at all levels of government that have responsibility for managing food safety risks at retail.

The FDA, FSIS, and CDC, in collaboration with the Conference for Food Protection, state and local public health and food control agencies, industry representatives, academia, and consumers have updated the 1999 Food Code to reflect the most current science and the best strategies to ensure a safer food supply in the United States. Major changes in this edition include the addition of specific criteria regarding the application and implementation of: the consumer advisory provisions, the prohibition of bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food, and provisions related to safely cooking hamburger and whole-muscle, intact beef steaks.

To protect consumers from foodborne diseases, we must strengthen the Nation's capacity to predict and prevent foodborne hazards and to monitor and rapidly react to outbreaks of foodborne diseases. To achieve the public health goal of reducing foodborne illness to the fullest extent possible, steps must be taken at each point in the farm-to-table chain where hazards can occur. Since publication of the last version of the Food Code in 1997, there has been important progress in our efforts to monitor and prevent foodborne diseases and ensure that consumers are provided the safest possible foods. These activities encompass the entire continuum of food production, food processing and manufacture, retail food stores, and food service to consumers and include:

The President's National Food Safety Initiative -- which recommends adoption and implementation of the Food Code -- and corresponding Congressional appropriations;

The initiative to ensure the safety of domestic and imported fresh fruits and vegetables;

Creation of the Foodborne Outbreak Response Coordinating Group (FORC-G) to improve federal and state agencies' response to foodborne disease outbreaks;

Initiation of PulseNet, a public health laboratory network that "fingerprints" bacteria and permits more rapid and accurate detection of foodborne illness outbreaks;

Expansion of FoodNet, the collaborative Foodborne Disease and Active Surveillance Network, which measures the burden and sources of foodborne disease in the United States;

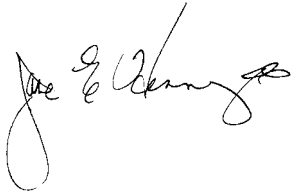
Establishment of the Joint Institute for Food Safety Research to coordinate food safety research and priority setting; and

Formation of the President's Council on Food Safety that will develop a strategic plan for federal food safety activities and recommend ways to enhance coordination and improve effectiveness in the food safety system.

One common theme of these initiatives is the need to better integrate the activities of the Federal agencies with those of State and local food safety agencies. Such integration can occur only when there is agreement among jurisdictions on regulatory standards. Adoption by all jurisdictions of the Food Code would result in uniform national standards and provide the foundation for a more uniform, efficient, and effective national food safety system.

The FDA, FSIS, and CDC endorse the Food Code because the Code provides public health and regulatory agencies with practical science-based advice and manageable, enforceable provisions for mitigating risk factors known to contribute to foodborne disease. In June 1998, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, and the Secretary of Agriculture, Dan Glickman, wrote to U.S. Governors asking them to support adoption of the Food Code by agencies in their state that have responsibility for the safety of food at retail. We are pleased to announce that in addition to the many federal agencies and tribal governments that have adopted the Code, as of September 1998, at least one agency in 14 states has adopted one of the editions of the Food Code and approximately 25 states have at least one agency in the process of adoption. The state and local agencies that have responsibility for regulating retail establishments that sell or serve food should use the Food Code as a model to help develop or update their own food safety rules and provide consistency among jurisdictions.

We congratulate those jurisdictions that have now adopted or are in the process of adopting the Food Code. We urge the rest to also consider its adoption. We stand ready to assist in that effort and look forward to further progress in achieving uniform, effective standards for food safety at retail nationwide.



Jane E. Henney, M.D.
Commissioner
Food and Drug Administration
Department of Health and Human Services



Tom Billy
Administrator
Food Safety and Inspection Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture



Jeffrey P. Koplan, M.D., M.P.H.
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Department of Health and Human Services