Keeping the Nation's Food Supply Safe:
FDA's Big Job Done Well

The FDA's **Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition** (CFSAN) has one of the agency's biggest jobs: it is responsible for the safety of **80 percent of all food** consumed in the United States—the entire food supply except for meat, poultry and some egg products, which are regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Each year, about $240 billion worth of this cornucopia comes from America's orchards, farms, lakes, and oceans, and passes through 50,000 food manufacturers, processors and warehouses. In addition, $15 billion worth of seafood, fresh produce and other foods are imported from every part of the globe.

Although the U.S. food supply is among the **safest in the world,** foodborne illness has been estimated to cause approximately 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths a year in the United States. CFSAN is advancing several programs to lower these figures. For example, it has pioneered widespread use of the **Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point** (HACCP) system, which places preventive controls at the most contamination-prone points in the production process. HACCP is required for the processing of seafood and has been incorporated into the Food Code for state health authorities. HACCP requirements were established for fruit and vegetable juice production in January 2001.

In addition, CFSAN's food scientists have developed rapid methods for the detection of microbial and viral food contaminants, and the FDA works closely with public- and private-sector partners to complete and operate two nationwide high-tech systems for rapid identification and control of outbreaks of foodborne diseases. Together with the FDA's efforts to promote safe food-handling practices in American homes and restaurants, these measures have **reduced illnesses** caused by the most common foodborne pathogens 20 percent from 1997 to 1999.

The FDA also plays a leading role in protecting the Nation's food against **bioterrorism.** Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, the FDA has received additional resources for a major strengthening of its staff of food inspectors, lab specialists, and equipment; it has requested new authorities to prevent the distribution of suspect food imports; and it has helped develop guidances to minimize the risk of terrorist contamination of food.

For more information, please call CFSAN at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (1-888-723-3366) or visit the FDA Web site at *www.cfsan.fda.gov*.

The Safety of Genetically Engineered Foods

The vast majority of foods developed using the tools of modern biotechnology—also called bioengineering—that the FDA has evaluated have not raised issues that would require premarket review and approval. To ensure that the FDA is fully aware of these products, the agency has proposed to make obligatory the current voluntary system under which food developers have consulted with the FDA before introducing their genetically modified products on the market. In the roughly 50 voluntary consultations done so far, the FDA's scientists were confident that the new foods contained no new allergens, no increased levels of toxicants and no unapproved food additives, and that important nutrients were not altered—in short, that these foods are as safe and wholesome as their conventional counterparts. The FDA is confident that the bioengineered foods reviewed under its system so far are safe for consumers.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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Office of Public Affairs
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