



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAY 16 2014

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-0504

Dear Senator Feinstein:

Thank you for your letters of March 18 and April 15, 2014, co-signed by Senator Dick Durbin and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, urging the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish performance standards for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* for all major product types, including poultry parts, to reduce the rates of foodborne illness.

I share your concern regarding rates of *Salmonella* contamination, which is why the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) developed the *Salmonella* Action Plan, and why poultry slaughter modernization is such a high priority for us. Because reducing the number of *Salmonella*- and *Campylobacter*-related illnesses is top priority, the Agency is in the process of setting performance standards for parts and comminuted poultry products. The FSIS Office of Public Health Science conducted a nationwide microbiological baseline data collection program for raw chicken parts in 2012. For the survey, raw chicken parts were tested for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. The report is available on the FSIS Web site at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/a9837fc8-0109-4041-bd0c-729924a79201/Baseline_Data_Raw_Chicken_Parts.pdf?MOD=AJPERES.

The Agency is analyzing the data to determine the appropriate performance standards to reduce the number of foodborne illnesses from these products. As you know, food safety is a key component of the Healthy People 2020 Initiative, with an entire focus area dedicated to efforts to reduce foodborne illnesses, such as those from *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. FSIS is working to ensure alignment with the public health objectives outlined in the Healthy People 2020 Initiative, and the Agency's own strategic goals as it develops performance standards for *Salmonella* and for *Campylobacter*.

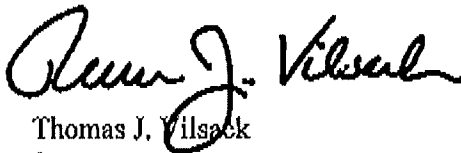
By the end of fiscal year 2014, FSIS expects to announce and request comment on the *Salmonella* performance standard for chicken parts. The Agency is developing a performance standard for *Campylobacter* on chicken parts and plans to announce and request comment at the same time as the *Salmonella* performance standard. FSIS is investigating the appropriateness of *Campylobacter* performance standards for comminuted poultry.

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Thank you again for writing and for your work on food safety. I look forward to working with you on this and other food safety issues. If you have further questions, or if we can be of additional assistance, please have your staff contact Ann Wright, Acting Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, at (202) 720-7095.

A similar letter is being sent to Senator Durbin and Senator Gillibrand.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom J. Vilsack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Vilsack" clearly legible.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary