

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 25, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write to commend the proposed poultry performance standards for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. We believe these standards are needed to improve food safety and public health, and look forward to working with you to implement them.

As a next step, we ask that the department develop new pathogen performance standards for pork and beef products. There are currently no *Salmonella* performance standards for ground pork or pork parts, and the standards for pork carcasses have not been updated in nearly 20 years. Ground beef *Salmonella* performance standards are similarly outdated, and there are no *Salmonella* standards for beef parts.

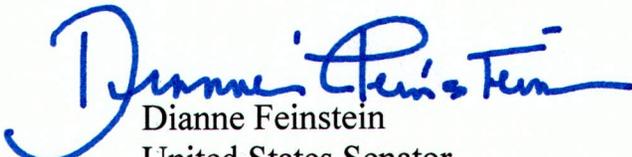
There is a clear need for new pathogen performance standards for pork and beef products. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that the United States has not reduced the number of *Salmonella* illnesses that occur each year. According to the CDC, pork products were implicated in 43 outbreaks involving *Salmonella* between 1998 and 2008. During this time period, pork was the third most common commodity implicated in domestic *Salmonella* outbreaks, surpassed by only poultry and eggs. Additionally, the CDC reports that beef products were implicated in 37 outbreaks involving *Salmonella* between 1998 and 2008.

To reduce the annual number of foodborne illnesses, pork and beef pathogen standards should be based on public health goals. We also believe that pathogens in pork and beef products need to be monitored in finished products that are ready for human consumption. Carcass standards do not adequately protect consumers because they do not reflect the prevalence of pathogens found in finished products. Foster Farms, a large poultry producer based in California, was in full compliance with the department's poultry carcass standards during the time period when it was linked to an outbreak of *Salmonella* Heidelberg that caused 634 illnesses in 29 states.

We were disappointed to see that the Food Safety and Inspection Service did not include the development of beef performance standards as part of its *Salmonella* Action Plan. The department's ground beef standard is currently set at 7.5 percent, while the National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System reports that 1.1 percent of *Salmonella* tests for ground beef in 2011 were positive. A more stringent performance standard is needed to push the industry to further improve food safety. Currently, the National School Lunch Program enforces a zero-tolerance standard for *Salmonella* in ground beef.

We reiterate our gratitude for your work to propose important new pathogen standards for poultry products. We hope your department will also begin work to develop new pathogen standards for pork and beef products. We truly appreciate your commitment to food safety, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator


Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator


Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

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