

Food Safety

While America's food supply is among the safest in the world, there are still millions that get sick each year due to consuming contaminated food. Some 9,000 die each year, mostly among the very young and the elderly. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that medical costs and productivity losses from 7 specific pathogens in food are estimated to be \$6.5 to \$34.9 billions annually. Total costs are likely to be much higher. These costs do not include the total burden placed on society by the chronic illness caused by some foodborne pathogens. These illnesses are caused by a variety of bacteria, viruses, chemicals, parasites, fungi, and other toxins. Since human survival depends on eating, it's up to us to prevent foodborne illness. Problems can arise anywhere along the food chain.

This could include:

- Production of food in unhealthy ways
- Purchase of outdated or improperly packaged foods
- Preparing foods in unsanitary situations
- Cooking foods improperly
- Storing foods at improper temperatures

Farming practices play a primary and important role in ensuring the safety and health of consumers. Examples of foodborne contamination at the production level include; salmonella in eggs transferred directly from the hen, molds and other toxic by products in grains, microorganisms in food products from animal manure wastes, transference of drugs from meat products, and bacteria transference due to poor sanitation on fresh produce.

The ultimate objective of the American system of food safety is preventing the public from getting sick from consuming food. This starts on the farm by:

- Providing a sanitary environment where food is produced
- Enforcing a proactive quality assurance system
- Producing, handling, and slaughtering livestock in a healthy manner
- Transferring meat and grain products without exposure to harmful pathogens
- Reduce the use of chemicals, drugs, pesticides, and herbicides within agricultural production

Children and youth play an important role in ensuring food safety. They can be taught at a young age ways to prevent foodborne illness within the farm environment.

- Stress the importance of using only the chemicals, drugs, and pesticides necessary to produce healthy livestock and grains
- Teach healthy methods of handling livestock
- Wash all raw foods before consuming them
- Wash hands before consuming any foods
- Cook foods to suggested temperatures
- Store foods for appropriate time periods and conditions

