

SAFE FOOD COALITION

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Consumer Groups Urge USDA to Declare Antibiotic-Resistant Strains of Salmonella Adulterants in Meat and Poultry

In the wake of the recent outbreak of antibiotic-resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg in which at least 107 people were sickened in 31 states and one person died, consumer groups are calling on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to declare certain strains of antibiotic-resistant *Salmonella* (ABR *Salmonella*) as adulterants and to prevent meat and poultry products contaminated with those strains from being sold to consumers.

In a letter to USDA Secretary Vilsack today, the groups¹ highlight a petition submitted by the Center for Science in the Public Interest in May 2011 which petitioned USDA to use its interpretive rulemaking authority to declare four separate strains of ABR *Salmonella* —Hadar, Heidelberg, Newport, and Typhimurium— as adulterants under both the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act. The most recent outbreak of ABR *Salmonella* Heidelberg prompted a recall of 36 million pounds of ground turkey products which had been distributed to over 1,000 retail stores across the country.

The petition supported by the groups noted that of the 36 documented outbreaks linked to antibiotic-resistant bacteria since the 1970s, 42 percent had occurred in the last decade. In addition, of the 36 outbreaks from antibiotic-resistant pathogens, 39 percent occurred in FSIS-regulated meat and poultry products, which caused nearly 1,400 illnesses, 93 hospitalizations and 5 deaths. Furthermore, surveillance data from the National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System (NARMS) retail meat surveillance program found that *Salmonella* Heidelberg and *Salmonella* Typhimurium have been among the most frequent serotypes identified in retail meat products, occurring in the list of the ten most common serotypes from 2002 to 2008.

ABR strains of *Salmonella* are a particular threat to human health because they are resistant to many of the drugs normally used to fight infection, which reduces the medical treatment options available.

The letter from the consumer groups is available here:
<http://www.consumerfed.org/pdfs/SFCLetterABRsalmonellapetition.pdf>

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¹ The following groups were signatories of the letter: Center for Foodborne Research & Prevention, Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union, Food & Water Watch, Government Accountability Project, Keep Antibiotics Working, National Consumers League, and STOP Foodborne Illness (formerly Safe Tables Our Priority).