

FOOD SAFETY

Ensuring America's Supply of Safe Fruits and Vegetables

Nearly a billion servings of fresh produce are safely consumed every day. However, our scientific ability to detect foodborne illness has outpaced our ability to respond, leaving consumers concerned about the safety of fruits and vegetables. The most pressing example is *Cyclospora*, a parasite that predictably causes numerous outbreaks each summer, is likely endemic in the US, and for which typical produce safety measures are ineffective. United Fresh supports the development and implementation of science-based food safety standards and policies that protect public health and urges the federal government to invest in research and develop a regulatory approach that will encourage the industry to innovate and adapt to emerging issues.

United Fresh prioritizes preventive produce safety approaches over reactive approaches. We oppose the Canadian requirement that romaine from parts of California to be tested prior to import, which is ostensibly a non-tariff trade barrier; instead, we support the risk-based treatment of water when appropriate and implementation of other measures necessary to reduce the risk of contamination via agricultural water or other means. FDA's continued delay in re-proposing federal requirements for the safety of agricultural water feeds the erroneous perception that industry is not managing risks. At the same time, the produce sector still awaits industry guidance and rule clarification critical for the full implementation of the Produce Safety and Preventive Controls rules.

Produce related foodborne illness outbreaks occur are highly visible. While the federal coordination of outbreak investigations has improved, communication to the affected industry and consumers still falls short, eroding consumer confidence in both government and the food industry, and triggering redundant reactive measures from buyers. The investigation into the root cause of contamination is critical to establishing risk mitigation measures that can be implemented across the industry, but is not currently done in a collaborative or timely manner.

Policy Priorities

- Invest in federal funding on *Cyclospora*, an emerging pathogen that sickens an estimated 150,000 Americans each year, and for which the produce industry lacks effective mitigations
 - We seek the appropriation of research funds to USDA to support a collaborative approach to tackle *Cyclospora*
- Support the expeditious finalization of requirements for agricultural water, traceability, and the definition of a "farm"
 - We ask for Senate confirmation of an FDA Commissioner that will be attentive to produce safety policy and ensure that the Agency is structured in a way that facilitates the efficient development of science-based regulations
- Establish partnerships with the federal agencies that play a role in foodborne illness investigation and the development of fresh produce sampling plans
 - We suggest a Congressional evaluation of the outbreak investigation process, including the identification and communication of root causes