



Testimony of

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Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

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Good afternoon, Madame Chair and members of the committee. My name is Mark Dopp and I am Senior Vice President and General Counsel for the American Meat Institute (AMI). I appreciate the opportunity to appear on AMI's behalf concerning today's topic – the food safety system and its effectiveness. With your permission, AMI will supplement this afternoon's testimony in a more detailed, written fashion.

AMI represents the interests of packers and processors of beef, pork, lamb, veal and turkey products and their suppliers throughout North America. Together, AMI's members produce 95 percent of the beef, pork, lamb, and veal products and 70 percent of the turkey products in the United States.

I would like to share with you today what we consider to be a success story, but admittedly one that has no final chapter. The 1990s were pivotal for the meat industry. It was a time of both crisis and progress and it was a period when we recognized publicly what we knew intuitively: that optimal food safety was good not just for our customers, it was good for our businesses.

During that time, at our urging through a petition, USDA mandated HACCP in all federally inspected meat and poultry plants. During that period also, our Board of Directors recognized that our collective knowledge was more powerful than the knowledge companies possessed individually. Thus, the AMI Board voted to make food safety a non-competitive issue. What that means is that when it comes

to information about food safety that AMI member companies have developed or discovered, they share it with each other without hesitation. Simply put, good ideas get better when they are adopted widely.

At the same time, AMI launched its Food Safety Initiative. The Board realized that just sharing information was not enough and to that end they revitalized the AMI Foundation. In so doing they voted with their checkbooks to fund the staffing of the Foundation and more importantly, to provide their own money to fund important food safety research projects that benefit everyone.

Since the beginning of the Food Safety Initiative, AMI members have generously provided millions of dollars to the Foundation with two key goals in mind: reducing and ultimately eliminating *E. coli* O157:H7 in fresh beef products and *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat products. In that regard, the Foundation has funded dozens of research projects at universities and private laboratories across the country with the goal of enhancing food safety. And this committee has enhanced that effort over the years through its strong annual support of complementary research funding to help eradicate *E. coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Salmonella* by providing funding to the Agricultural Research Service and CSREES.

We are pleased to be able to say that our achievements in these areas are real. Although we continue the battle against both *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Listeria monocytogenes*, and have added *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* to the list of targeted organisms, it is clear that our efforts have helped sustain a downward trend in both the incidence of these organisms on meat and poultry products and in the human infections that can result from them.

Specifically, the incidence of *E. coli* O157:H7 in ground beef products is down by 80 percent over the last five years. Likewise, *E. coli* O157:H7 infections are down sharply, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Similarly, the incidence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat meat and poultry products is down by 70 percent and illnesses caused by *Listeria* are also down. Consistent with these results, the number of meat and poultry recalls, and the pounds of product involved in those recalls, are down dramatically.

But this story involves more than funding research. It involves reaching out and educating the industry so that everyone does a better job. In that regard, AMI has held numerous best practice workshops. Best practice workshops on Beef Processing, *Listeria* control in RTE production, Sanitary Equipment and Facility Design, and Allergen control have reached thousands of front line food safety managers in our meat processing facilities. The faculty of these workshops is comprised of the best and brightest scientific minds from our member companies and they share willingly with their competitors and with USDA the knowledge and insights they have gleaned from their companies' food safety efforts.

With respect to the recent GAO report, we certainly welcome increased coordination among federal agencies that will make meaningful improvements in the safety and security of the food supply. Given the demonstrated food safety progress that has been made in the meat and poultry industry in collaboration with USDA, the meat industry would approach any efforts to reallocate resources or reorganize federal oversight with both an open mind and a heavy dose of caution. Before any such changes occur we want to be sure that they accelerate – and do not derail – food safety progress and public health outcomes.

In summary, AMI is proud of the efforts and progress we have made to enhance food safety. We recognize, however, that that ongoing vigilance is necessary. In that regard, we look forward to working collaboratively with this committee so that it may continue to fund important research that can further enhance the work that has been done.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.