

USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum 2010
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Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this panel to discuss “Strengthening America’s Food Safety System.” NMA has served the interests of the meat packing industry since 1946. Our members are committed to safe high-quality food production. NMA provides regulatory and technical assistance as well as Pathogen Reduction (PR) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) support and education to our members. We provide a network for academia, food safety regulators and all segments of the industry to come together through workshops, conferences, conventions, and ad hoc meetings. In fact, just last week we held our Annual Meeting which featured senior level food safety regulators, academia, and industry experts. The majority of our Roundtables, Forums, and committee meetings focused on food safety. The safety of meat and meat products is far and away the industry’s number one priority.

The current regulatory system for the safety of meat and meat products is strong and effective. However, continuous improvement must be an integral component of the system. The most effective way to strengthen the food safety system is through the collective efforts of all of the stakeholders. The future for the meat industry is dependent on the effective use of process controls that embrace current technology and are supported by the most current science.

It is imperative that the regulatory process does not constrain innovation and is inherently flexible enough to encourage continuous improvement. A regulatory food safety system should be risk based with measurable public health outcomes. Public health data along with data collected during processing should be the basis for assessing risk. Both industry and regulators should use the risk assessment to manage risk. The entire system from producer to consumer must focus on the prevention of food borne illnesses. There is no silver bullet! Every segment from pre-harvest forward must make every effort to reduce the risk of food borne illnesses. The redundancy of interventions is critical.

Finally, I would close with a thought on communications. Regulators should communicate with all constituents during policy development. New policies must consider the realities of production and add value to the overall food safety initiative. Once a policy is developed it is too late to add value from the input of stakeholders. If stakeholders can be brought in early in the process, then all stakeholders benefit, including the regulators.

Thank you and I look forward to further discussions on this critical issue.