

# FOOD SAFETY

## RANKED RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Introduction:

A Joint ESCOP/ECOP Task Force on Food Safety recently provided a report with 51 recommendations for the Land Grant Universities. This report was in response to a recently developed National Food Safety Strategic Plan. The ESCOP Executive Committee requested that the Task Force give consideration to prioritizing those recommendations.

### Process:

The 51 recommendations were organized into a survey instrument suitable for scoring, on a scale of 1 to 5, the importance AND the likelihood of having an impact. The survey instrument was e-mailed to the Task Force members, with instructions for completing and returning their responses.

### Responses and Analysis:

Fourteen of the Task Force members responded by the deadline. The data were plotted for the individual questions, for each of the respondents. Patterns of 1) high importance AND 2) high likelihood of having an impact were used to select 14 of the recommendations (a mere coincidence with the number of responses). The following report was based on those 14 highly ranked recommendations. Some suggested 'action items' have been added by this report's author.

### Results:

The following statements and suggested 'action items' were derived from the recommendations that were highly ranked, based on the responses received from the Task Force members. It must be noted, however, that a collective expression *via* this unscientific survey does not necessarily invalidate the merit of any of the individual recommendations found in the Food Safety Task Force's initial report.

1. Along with the food industry, and including our traditional partners at USDA and FDA, and with input from our public and private stakeholders, we should develop specific research agendas to address:

The knowledge gaps concerning characteristics of certain food borne hazards; the sources of these hazards; and existing and potential pre- and post-harvest control measures from production through consumption, including pathogen detection, intervention, and control methods. Additionally, we should continue research aimed at identifying sensitive production and processing steps where food safety hazards are most likely to occur.

2. For emerging agents of food borne illness, there is a need to:

Resolve problems with pathogen identification; devise improved detection methodologies; locate the sources and ecology of these agents; and determine their properties vis-à-vis resistance and control.

3. In the area of risk analysis and risk management there is a need to:

Collaborate with the key federal agencies to fill voids in the biological, behavioral, and economic assessments of food safety risks; seek more funding for risk analysis and communication methodologies; and initiate research collaborations with behavioral scientists to identify barriers to adoption of safe food handling practices by consumers. Additionally, there is a need to support the establishment of a national scientific food safety database with special emphasis on storage of data

on microbial pathogens and allergens needed for risk assessment. As a byproduct, this database should support national needs for identifying data gaps and research needs.

4. In the area of education and communication, there is a need to:

Begin immediately to collaborate with the FDA to enhance connectivity and expand access to food safety information from government, industry, and university sources. There is also a need to maintain through Cooperative Extension a train-the-trainer approach so that the power of its vast human resources can be focused on critical issues, such as the training of food service workers and school staffs.

**Suggested Action Items:**

- For item 1 above we suggest that the leadership of ESCOP, with selected members of the Food Safety Task Force and selected industry representatives, meet with the leadership of USDA/CSREES and FDA. Their purpose would be to assess the relevance of current requests for proposals under AREERA Sections 401 and 406 funding authorities, plus the USDA/CSREES/NRI, to verify agreement of current food safety priorities.
- For item 2 above we suggest a small group of experts be invited to write a 'White Paper' on the unique challenges presented by emerging food borne-illness agents, with attention to accidental and intentional introductions. A drafting team of three or four food safety experts should be able to set out the research and education considerations, and make suggests on the activities needed to initiate appropriate responses by the Land Grant Universities.
- For item 3 above we suggest that ESCOP and ECOP leaders visit with the USDA Office of Risk Management to determine the degree of interest in partnering with the Land Grant Universities in food safety risk management, and assess the opportunities to obtain funding from ORM to support such activities. Additionally, similar contacts with FDA, CDC, and DOD might be worthwhile.

Additionally, for item 3 above we suggest that ESCOP and ECOP leaders contact the Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (JIFSAN) and the National Food Safety Alliance to determine their interest in providing national leadership to an effort to organize and support food safety databases.

- For item 4 above we suggest that ECOP engage in conversations with FDA regarding opportunities for additional collaborations in education and communication regarding food safety.

Finally, the Task Force recommends that ESCOP and ECOP jointly form a permanent Food Safety Task Force, to continue to address these important issues.

END OF TEXT

7/30/00