



News Release

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HHS CREATES FOOD SECURITY RESEARCH PROGRAM, INCREASES IMPORT EXAMS MORE THAN FIVE TIMES TO PROTECT NATION'S FOOD SUPPLY **Progress Report Details Ongoing Efforts To Enhance The Nation's Food Security**

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced \$5 million in funding to support a new research program to develop technologies and strategies to prevent and minimize potential threats to the safety and security of the nation's food supply. The announcement came as HHS' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a new report highlighting the department's progress toward enhancing the nation's food security -- including a more-than-five-fold increase in the number of imported food examinations.

"Americans need to feel secure that the food they eat is safe and healthy," Secretary Thompson said. "We are investing unprecedented time, energy and resources to make sure the food that goes from our nation's ports and food facilities to our families' dinner tables is safe. While we have made significant improvements over the last two years, we are building on our success by working harder to enhance security, including many more food inspections at our borders."

The new report, submitted by FDA Commissioner Mark D. McClellan to Secretary Thompson, highlights the department's progress in making the food supply safer and more secure, in 10 critical focus areas.

For example, for fiscal year 2003, FDA has quintupled the number of imported food examinations it conducted in fiscal year 2001 -- reaching 62,000 inspections so far this year, compared with 12,000 in all of fiscal year 2001.

The increase exceeds the agency's goal.

The increased coverage reflects a steep increase in the number of ports of entry with FDA staffing from 40 to 90; FDA's intensive efforts during a period of heightened security alert earlier this year (Operation Liberty Shield); and enhanced collaboration with other government agencies to protect the food supply more efficiently.

This progress stems in large measure from the \$96 million increase in the agency's food-security budget achieved by Secretary Thompson in fiscal years 2002 and 2003. Those additional resources enabled FDA to hire 655 new field personnel that work almost exclusively on food security and food safety. President Bush's fiscal year 2004 budget requests another \$116.3 million to further protect the nation's food supply.

"We will continue to maximize our efforts to give Americans the most protection possible from deliberate or accidental food risks," Dr. McClellan said. "That includes not only using the best ideas that science has to offer, but seeking out still better ideas and methods."

The \$5 million in new research funding is being made available from the post-9/11 Emergency Response Fund. The White House Office of Management and Budget is allocating these funds to the FDA, which will use them for food security research, including efforts to develop new prevention and mitigation technologies and to improve the ability to assess foods for contamination with chemical, biological and radiological agents.

The research program, expanded food inspections and border resources are part of Secretary Thompson's comprehensive approach to enhancing food security. FDA's progress report highlights efforts in 10 critical focus areas, reflecting a five-pronged strategy to ensure the safety and security of the roughly 80 percent of the nation's food supply under its jurisdiction.

The strategy involves (1) developing increased awareness among federal, state, local and tribal governments and the private sector by collecting, analyzing and disseminating information and knowledge to reduce vulnerabilities; (2) developing capacity for rapid identification of a specific threat or attack on the food supply if one occurs; (3) developing effective protection strategies to "shield" the food supply from terrorist threats; (4) developing capacity for rapid, coordinated response to a foodborne terrorist attack, including "surge capacity" and the ability to contain the attack quickly; and (5) developing capacity for rapid, coordinated recovery from a foodborne terrorist attack.

The events of September 11, 2001, heightened the nation's awareness and placed a renewed focus on ensuring the protection of the nation's critical infrastructures such as the food supply. One of the first actions FDA undertook was to increase surveillance and inspections of food imports and food establishments. Of the new 655 field personnel trained in food safety activities, 300 are specifically involved in investigations at U.S. ports of entry.

Other highlights from the progress report include:

- HHS has already proposed four regulations to implement provisions of the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 and is working to finalize them based on the public comments received. The proposals would require registration of food facilities, advance notice of food imports and improved record-keeping for imported foods and would provide FDA with the authority to detain food when there is credible evidence that it poses a threat of serious adverse health consequences or death.
- In order to assist industry and involve them in FDA's mission of protecting the food supply, the agency has issued five guidance documents which recommend steps companies throughout the food industry, from the largest manufacturers to the smallest retailers, can consider to minimize the risk that food under their control will be subject to any criminal or terrorist attack.
- FDA has redirected existing research and laboratory staff to ensure that appropriate resources are focused on key food safety and security issues. The agency has also developed laboratory methods involving priority biological and chemical agents in food.
- FDA has expanded its collaborations with the Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement and intelligence agencies on research, emergency response and information exchange. This includes new collaboration with Customs and Border Control to collect and exchange information on imports, and to work more closely together on evaluating imports.

The full progress report is available at <http://www.fda.gov/oc/initiatives/foodsecurity/>.

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