

Global food safety: Keeping food safe from farm to table

November 4 2010

Food safety problems can arise at any of multiple stages of food production, and illnesses that result from them are frequently not detected or reported, according to a new report from the American Academy of Microbiology.

The report, "Global [Food Safety](#): Keeping Food Safe from Farm to Table," is based on a colloquium convened by the Academy in 2009. Colloquium participants with expertise in microbiology, [public health](#), [food science](#), and economics reviewed the current state of affairs in microbiological food safety around the world.

The path from food production to consumption is increasingly complicated. Each plate of food may contain ingredients from many countries—each of which may have passed through different processing facilities, and may have been handled by wholesalers, retailers, and multiple transportation companies before finally reaching the consumer's shelf or refrigerator. No single agency regulates all of the steps in this process.

Each link in the food safety chain would benefit from further research and new technologies—specific examples of which are detailed in this report. Regulations that promote good agricultural and manufacturing practices would not only help decrease lapses in food safety, but would make it easier to trace problems back to their inception.

Consumer education is also an important component of food safety.

Consumers are often unaware of safe food handling practices, especially as new [food products](#) are introduced. Because consumer-caused foodborne illnesses are often not recognized as such, much less systematically reported, an important barrier to reducing their incidence is inadequate knowledge of which foods, agents, and practices pose the greatest risk.

It is very difficult to know how many people are made sick by food, which foods are at fault, which pathogens are most widespread or dangerous, and where those pathogens entered the food production system. In such a situation, where should research, prevention and education efforts be directed? In this report, each step in our complicated food production and supply system is described, highlighting key points of vulnerability and making it clear that providing safe food is a shared responsibility.

Food safety is complex, and a perfectly safe food supply is an unrealistic goal. However, as this report explains, there are opportunities for improving food safety at each step of the production and [consumption](#) process and many areas where further research could help identify and quantify risks and generate solutions. The report also identifies food safety vulnerabilities that might be addressed through investments in new technologies or more effective education.

More information: A full copy of the report and further recommendations can be found on the Academy website at [academy.asm.org/images/stories ... obal Food Safety.pdf](http://academy.asm.org/images/stories...obal_Food_Safety.pdf)

Provided by American Society for Microbiology

Citation: Global food safety: Keeping food safe from farm to table (2010, November 4) retrieved

25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-11-global-food-safety-safe-farm.html>

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