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**E. coli O157:H7 Incidence Drops 43 Percent in 2004  
Downward Decline on Track to Meet 2010 Government Goals, Says AMI**

(Washington, D.C., February 28, 2005)-- Continuing its downward trend, *E. coli* O157:H7 prevalence in ground beef showed a 43.0 percent decline in 2004 compared to 2003, according to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service. With more than 8,000 samples taken in 2004, only 0.17 percent tested positive for *E. coli* O157:H7 compared to a 0.30 percent incidence rate in 2003. The percentage of *E. coli* O157:H7 positive ground beef samples has shown a steady downward trend from 0.86 percent in 2000.

"The steady decline in *E. coli* O157:H7 is a success story and testament to the industry's commitment to continually improve its food safety programs," said James Hodges, president of the American Meat Institute (AMI) Foundation.

Hodges noted that the lower prevalence of *E. coli* O157:H7 in ground beef has also helped reduce foodborne illness in the United States. Last year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed a 36 percent reduction in illnesses from *E. coli* O157:H7 in 2003 compared to 2002. "The continuing drop of both occurrences of illness from *E. coli*, and the prevalence of *E. coli*, are part of the pay-off for an all-out effort by the meat industry to make food safety our number one priority over the last several years," added Hodges.

In 2001, the AMI Foundation declared that its two priorities would be to reduce and ultimately eliminate *E. coli* O157:H7 on fresh beef products and *Listeria monocytogenes* on ready-to-eat products. "It's rewarding to see that the pro-active measures we're taking in the meat industry are having direct pay-off for the American public and consumers of American meat across the globe," said Hodges.

In 2001, AMI member companies declared food safety a non-competitive issue and began sharing data, technologies and ideas with one another in an effort to reduce bacteria and enhance safety. The industry has invested several million dollars in research aimed at finding new and better ways to eliminate bacteria.