



Downward Trend of E. coli O157:H7 Indicates Success of Multi-Hurdle Food Safety Strategy, AMI Says

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USDA data showing a drop in the number of E. coli O157:H7 positive samples in ground beef collected reflects the success of a multiple-hurdle approach to food safety by industry and government alike, AMI said this week.

Of the samples collected and analyzed through Aug. 31, 0.32 percent tested positive for E. coli O157:H7, down from 0.78 percent in 2002 and 0.84 percent in 2001, USDA announced last week. Since 2001, FSIS has collected more than 7,000 samples annually to test for the presence of E. coli O157:H7 in raw ground beef. USDA released the data late last week.

AMI President and CEO J. Patrick Boyle said the Institute supports USDA's message that the industry's reliance on "multiple-hurdle" systems to control pathogens in fresh meat products has proven effective.

"There is no doubt that the sustained and determined commitment of meatpackers and processors to develop and implement a variety of anti-microbial interventions in their plants is now bearing fruit," Boyle said. "Consumers should be encouraged that the meat products they purchase and enjoy are safer than ever."

Although the meat industry understands the importance of the regulatory framework administered by USDA, Boyle emphasized that the industry views them as the starting line -- not the finish line -- in the food-safety fight.

"While USDA officials are right to join us in sharing the good news from this recent survey, it is the continued and comprehensive commitment our industry makes every day to improve its efforts at controlling E. coli O157:H7 that will deliver future results we are confident will be even more encouraging than this dramatic new data," Boyle said.

For more information on E. coli, visit <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/topics/o157.htm#3>