

Media Workshop On Food Safety Draws Record Number of Reporters

Nearly 30 people, many of whom were journalists covering the meat and poultry industry, attended the Media Workshop on Food Safety held September 8th, in Washington DC. This event, which was the third in a series of timely discussions sponsored by the Meat and Poultry Industry Media Relations Committee, was hosted by AMI.

The panel discussion was chaired by Dr. S. Robert Lichter, director of the Statistical Assessment Service (STATS) and professor of communications at the George Mason University. Lichter noted the dearth of coverage of positive trends in food safety and the propensity of media outlets to write alarmist stories and magnify isolated food related illnesses.

Panelists included the American Meat Institute Foundation's Dr. Randall Huffman, Caroline Smith De Waal from the Center for Science in the Public Interest, and Shelley Feist with the Partnership for Food Safety Education.

Panelists were asked to assess the safety of the American food supply, the effectiveness of regulations in the food industry, and comparisons with food safety in the U.S. and abroad. Randy Huffman argued that food safety in the U.S. was "among the best in the world." Huffman noted that the occurrence of food borne illness in relation to the number of meals consumed annually "is extremely low." "It's clear that by all reasonable assessments, the U.S. food supply is very safe," noted Huffman.

Shelley Feist promoted the Fight BAC! Campaign, which is working towards being a "one stop information resource" for members of the public and policy makers seeking answers on food safety. Caroline Smith DeWaal predicted that there would be a national debate in the upcoming months over the merits of a single food safety agency.

All three panelists agreed that the media handled the BSE incident in the U.S. in a responsible and factual manner.