

NEWS RELEASE

NASDA RELEASES LEGISLATION TO REFORM THE MEAT AND POULTRY INSPECTION SYSTEM

FOR RELEASE AUGUST 24, 1995

WASHINGTON -- The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) today said that they strongly believe that the 104th Congress should consider and pass legislation reforming the meat and poultry inspection system. In a Washington, D.C. press conference, the Commissioners, Secretaries and Directors of the state departments of agriculture released a bill which they suggested should be used as the foundation for reform of the nation's inspection laws as Congress debates the issue.

"In our opinion the current inspection system must be reformed both by legislation and through the regulatory process," said NASDA President and Director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Bruce Andrews. "Rather than building a new Ivory HACCP tower on top of the weak foundation of the current system, we need to construct a new product from the foundation up."

Andrews explained that NASDA was releasing the legislation as an attempt to continue moving the debate on reform forward. He said the organization had carefully reviewed the current system, analyzed options for reform, and met with Members of Congress, the administration, health groups, and industry to formulate the "risk-based, science-based proposal which will bring much needed reform to the meat and poultry inspection system."

NASDA President-elect and Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, Alan T. Tracy, described how state officials are at the "front lines" of the food safety system. "Preserving the safety and integrity of the nation's food supply and assuring the health and safety of the public is our highest calling," he stated. "Though the American food supply is the safest in the world, there are always ways to improve, and the opportunity exists today."

Tracy suggested that while the current meat and poultry inspection system has served us well in the past, it is in need of an overhaul. "The new system our legislation proposes will replace the outdated ineffective parts of the current law while preserving the effective parts. It does not simply layer a new concept on top of the current system, but provides a comprehensive revision of the inspection system."

The legislation proposed by NASDA will create a new inspection system authorized by a single law calling for mandatory science-based inspection at all levels of production of all species whose flesh is used for food, including meat, poultry, exotic and aquatic animals. "Retail and restaurant operations have evolved and today are conducting complex processing with significantly less oversight when compared to similar risks." Tracy continued, adding that "some of those processes include grinding, curing, smoking, vacuum packaging, and distribution of meat, poultry and seafood products which have the potential to pose significant risks to the consumer."

Tracy said the NASDA approach provides for a government-wide evaluation of food safety. "When properly coordinated, such an evaluation will eliminate costly duplication and will result in a better food regulation system, and provide for the allocation of scarce fiscal resources in a manner that ensures the safety of the American food supply."

Terry Burkhardt, President of the National Association of State Meat and Food Inspection Directors

(NASMFID) and Director of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Meat and Safety and Inspection Bureau, said that in order to meet today's demand for a meat and poultry supply that is safe from all hazards, including pathogens that cannot be detected by traditional means, it is evident that current meat and poultry inspection laws must be changed. "Meat and poultry inspection reform should include the best available technology while retaining those parts of current meat and poultry inspection laws which have assured the United States public a safe supply of meat and poultry in the past," he said. "This includes careful organoleptic examination of animals and carcasses by trained professionals to detect disease, tumors and other neoplasms, inflammation, bruises, fractures, parasites, and injection sites. Animals affected by any diseases transmissible to man such as tuberculosis, and animals with toxemia or septicemia can best be detected through sensory evaluation during ante- and post-mortem examination."

Burkhardt explained that meat, poultry and seafood, and meat, poultry and seafood products can be produced safely through cooperative efforts of the industry and the government utilizing scientific inspection systems such as the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system rather than continuous inspection.

"Any change in meat and poultry inspection should consider all businesses in the meat manufacturing arena. Risk assessments in all areas from farm-to-table should be accomplished and inspection resources allotted respective to the amount of risk to the consumer based on the type of process and product rather than the type of distribution system," Burkhardt continued "the public should be confident in their belief that all flesh foods offered for sale or prepared for consumption have been prepared under an effective inspection system."

The NASDA proposal also provides for a public education program on the proper handling of meat, poultry and seafood by consumers and food handlers. "It is equally important that the public know that with current technology it is impossible to guarantee a meat supply that is free of microbes; therefore, the consumer, an important link in preventing food borne illnesses related to meat products, must be provided with continuous education information regarding safe food handling." Burkhardt stated.

Dr. Lee Jan, Chairman of the NASDA-NASMFID Task Force on Meat and Poultry Inspection Reform and Director of the Texas Department of Health, Meat Safety Assurance Program amplified the need to include all facets of meat, poultry, exotic, and aquatic animal production - from the farm to the consumer - in the inspection system. "You will find the legislation modifies the definitions of livestock and poultry to include those species not currently included under the laws," he said. "Livestock and poultry like ostrich, emu, alligator, buffalo, rabbits and the like will now be subject to inspection. And the bill will also - for the first time - mandate that all seafood and seafood products, produced in confinement or in the open waters, be inspected."

Jan said that the risks of foodborne disease will be reduced by incorporating HACCP principles into all phases of food production. "HACCP plans developed by producers, slaughterers, processors, retailers, and restaurants will assess the risks at all levels of production and introduce steps at each of these levels to reduce the possibility of foodborne disease. Our legislation clearly changes the inspection system to a risk-based system by requiring wholesale and retail operations that process meat, poultry and seafood products be subject to inspection," he said, adding that "by eliminating the exemptions found in the current law and thereby adding retail and food service establishments to the requirements, we are mandating a total food system inspection process which will enhance food safety."

Jan also explained that the bill will require the Secretary of Agriculture to work with the livestock and poultry producer community to develop on-farm quality assurance programs. "These programs should be developed for each industry and each segment of production through a coordinated, cooperative

effort of producers, producer organizations, veterinary practitioners, state agencies concerned with animal and human health, universities, and appropriate federal agencies,": he continued. "Preharvest quality assurance programs should identify diseases, conditions, chemical agents, and microorganisms of concern to food safety." He said the bill also directs USDA to identify research needs so necessary epidemiological and ecological data can be generated that will identify risk factors, diagnostic procedures, critical control points, and intervention strategies.

"Finally, our bill will continue the strong relationship between the federal inspection program and state inspection programs. The measure places the same requirements on small, state inspected plants and removes the unfair economic prohibition against shipping state-inspected product in interstate commerce." Jan concluded.

The bill proposed by NASDA would:

- Create a new comprehensive inspection system authorized by a single law.
- Mandate a science-based, risk-based inspection system at all levels of production from slaughter through retail.
- Include all species whose flesh is used for food, including meat, poultry, exotic animals and seafood.
- Provide for voluntary quality assurance programs to reduce the occurrence of pathogens at the farm or ranch level.
- Mandate a national public education program on the appropriate handling and preparation of meat, poultry, and seafood by consumers and foods service handlers.
- Authorize USDA to conduct research regarding improved sanitation methods and other techniques which lead to safer food supply.
- Continue the cooperative relationship between the federal inspection program and equivalent state programs.
- Repeal the unfair prohibition on the interstate shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry products.

NASDA is a nonprofit association of public officials representing the Commissioners, Secretaries and Directors of Agriculture in the fifty states and four territories.



[Go to the International Meat & Poultry HACCP Alliance Home Page](http://www.haccpalliance.org/alliance/NASDAhottopic.html)