



Safety tactics differ for different foods

I recently saw something about the government increasing its efforts to combat *Salmonella* in poultry. But isn't *Salmonella* also a potential problem in fresh produce? Why not include fruits and vegetables, too?

You're right. Fresh produce also can be contaminated with *Salmonella* or other pathogens, but there are good reasons why it was not included in the Salmonella Action Plan that you heard about.

First, the agency overseeing the plan, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, regulates meat, poultry and processed egg products and does not have any authority to make rules for other foods.

Also, the farm-to-fork production chains of poultry and fresh produce are very different, requiring completely different strategies. It makes sense to separate the two.

Another agency, the Food and Drug Administration under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is in charge of overseeing produce safety, and it is also working on battling *Salmonella*. For example, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act was passed in January 2011. Under that law, early this year the FDA proposed Produce Safety Standards with new regulations designed to prevent contamination of fruits and vegetables that are

normally eaten raw.

Although those standards are not finalized yet, the industry is making other attempts to protect consumers, such as guidelines for producing, storing and transporting cantaloupes and similar types of melons. Those guidelines, released earlier this year, resulted after dozens of cantaloupe-related outbreaks starting in 1990.

The reasons for the increasing emphasis on *Salmonella* are clear: It's the most common cause of foodborne-illness related hospitalizations in the country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Salmonella* causes an estimated 1.2 million illnesses in the U.S., is the No. 1 cause of foodborne illness-related deaths, and costs about \$365 million in medical expenses every year. As with any foodborne illness, children, older adults, pregnant women and those with chronic illness are most at risk.

To reduce the risk from *Salmonella* and other pathogens, be sure to cook foods thoroughly; properly rinse fresh produce before eating or cutting; and wash your hands, utensils and surfaces before handling food. For details, see "Quick Tips for Preventing Salmonella" from the CDC at <http://bit.ly/prevsalm>.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to *Chow Line*, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu



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