

Americans' Attitudes On Food Safety

*Findings from a nationwide survey of registered voters, conducted by
Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies*

Key findings from this survey

The vast majority of voters across the country support new federal food safety legislation. Individual measures enjoy very strong support, particularly requiring other countries to certify their own food safety systems; increasing FDA inspection frequency of food facilities; and requiring a tracing system that would allow the FDA to track contaminated food back to its source. A significant majority of voters worry at least somewhat about the safety of the food they eat, and more than half have lost confidence in the safety of food. Far from being a partisan issue, voters across the political spectrum agree that the federal government should be responsible for ensuring food is safe to eat.

Nine out of 10 American voters support the federal government putting new safety measures into place.

- 89% of voters support the government putting a battery of new safety measures into place, including 61% who *strongly* support this. Support crosses gender, age, economic, and even partisan lines—96% of Democrats, 88% of independents, and 83% of Republicans support such legislation.
- Support for individual measures that could be included in this legislation is similarly very high, with nine in 10 voters or more favoring the following:
 - Requiring foreign countries that export to the U.S. to certify that their food safety systems are as strong as ours (92%)
 - Requiring tracing systems that enable the FDA to trace food back to its source (94%)
 - Requiring the FDA to inspect food facilities every six to 12 months (91%)
 - Requiring food companies to test for contamination and report results to the government (92%)
 - Requiring produce growers meet standards for water quality, manure use, and worker sanitation (90%)
 - Giving the FDA authority to issue mandatory food recalls (89%)

Support for requiring food companies to pay an annual fee of \$1,000 per facility to help fund FDA food safety activity is somewhat lower, but still very robust at 66%.

(cont'd)

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- Voters are, in fact, so supportive of these measures that fully 72% say it would be worth it to pay between 3% and 5% more in grocery costs to have these new safety measures—this is true among lower-income (77% worth it), middle-income (74%), and higher-income voters (69%).

Voters are adamant that these measures should be mandatory.

- 70% of Americans say that these measures should be mandatory because it will ensure that all food businesses are meeting the same safety standards.
- 27% would prefer the measure be voluntary because food businesses already are required to meet many standards, and food safety is in their best business interest anyway.

Four in five voters say the federal government should be responsible for ensuring that food is safe to eat.

- 83% of voters say the federal government should be responsible, compared with 11% who say it should not be responsible for food safety.
- Voters across the board hold this belief, regardless of their gender, age, income, or area of residency. Again, virtually no partisan differences exist on this point, with 88% of Democrats, 85% of independents, and 77% of Republicans saying the government should be responsible.
- Voters are especially focused on the safety of imported foods—two in three (64%) say the federal government is doing too little to ensure that food produced in other countries and sold in the U.S. is safe from contamination. They are somewhat less focused on domestically produced food, though still half (48%) say the government is doing too little to ensure safety in this area.

A majority of Americans are worried about bacterial contamination of their food, and many say they have lost confidence in the safety of the food they eat.

- Nearly three in five (58%) voters say that bacterial contamination of food worries them a great deal or somewhat; 31% say it does not worry them that much, and just 11% say they are not at all worried.
- Indeed, many see the situation in food safety worsening. A majority (55%) of voters say that what they have seen and heard over the past year has made them less confident in the safety of food sold in the U.S.; just 17% are more confident, and 24% say it has made no difference.

These findings are derived from a nationwide survey of 1,005 registered voters, conducted June 29 through July 3, 2009, by Hart Research Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) on behalf of the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Produce Safety Project. Respondents were reached by telephone through a random-digit dial method of sampling. The results of the poll are statistically representative of the opinions of voters across the country, and carry a margin of error of ± 3.1 percentage points for the full sample, and higher margins of error for subgroups of the sample.