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Sent: Thursday, November 15, 2018 4:28 PM

To: Sarah Zimmerman <szimmerman@politico.com>

Subject: RE: statement on salmonella/turkey?

November 14, 2018

Salmonella Reading Outbreak Statement

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and state health departments are working together to investigate and bring to an end the outbreak of *Salmonella* Reading in raw turkey products.

We know that 164 people from 35 states have become ill over the past year from this strain of *Salmonella*. However, the outbreak strain has been identified in a wide range of samples including raw turkey pet food, raw turkey products, and live turkeys. Our public health partners have interviewed case patients, and 64% of those patients report eating turkey products. Of the patients who report eating different types and brands of turkey products purchased from different stores, some couldn't be certain they ate turkey products while others reported handling raw turkey pet food and/or raw turkey or working with live turkeys or living with someone who handled live turkeys. We have interviewed patients, looked at receipts and shopper card data, and tested any product that case patients still have. All this information is necessary to link back to a supplier or establishment. Despite these ongoing efforts, we do not have the evidence to pinpoint a single common supplier of turkey products. Like any investigation, we are chasing down leads and looking for evidence.

If FSIS had the ability to identify the source of this *Salmonella* strain, then the agency would immediately recall the items. If we had specific products that we could alert consumers to with a Public Health Alert, we would issue one. At the moment, there is no actionable information for consumers, other than to remind them that this is an ongoing investigation and that consumers should **always handle raw turkey carefully and cook it thoroughly to prevent food poisoning. This outbreak is a reminder that raw turkey products can have germs that spread around food preparation areas and can make you sick.**

That brings us to the recent demands by special interest groups regarding their accusation that FSIS is withholding information that consumers need to make informed decisions. FSIS takes

more than 40,000 raw poultry samples a year in over 6,400 regulated establishments. The agency makes millions of data points available every year, and every month is adding additional reports related to sampling results and individual establishment food safety results – all in an effort to satisfy stakeholder appetite for a more accessible regulatory agency. We will continue to do so. In fact, special interest groups would have no window into the federal government investigation into this outbreak if FSIS hadn't shared information with them. However, it would be grossly irresponsible and reckless to associate producers with an outbreak investigation, when a link from an establishment to an illness has not been made. It's also not helpful to consumers. Trace back investigations are conducted in the field through on the ground work, not Monday morning quarterbacking from the comforts of an urban high rise in New York City or K Street in Washington, D.C., with fundraising pleas attached.

To be abundantly clear, FSIS has NOT identified a source or supplier of the product or products that are making consumers ill, but we continue to work around the clock with our federal and state public health partners to solve this. It is insulting to suggest that the agency would not move forward if we had actionable information. FSIS is a public health agency that moves forward when science can serve as the foundation of our action plan—not when emotion or pressure from for-profit industry or special interest groups demand it.

As families start their holiday plans they may be wondering what this means for them. The answer is simple. *Salmonella* is prevalent and can be present in raw meat and poultry and in live poultry – no raw meat or poultry is sterile. Consumers can protect themselves by cooking their turkey, other poultry products, and meat thoroughly. The cooking process kills the *Salmonella*. No one should be eating partially cooked or raw turkey. Additionally, it is essential that people wash their hands after handling raw poultry, meat and pet food to avoid cross contamination of other foods, spice containers, or kitchen surfaces.

FSIS will continue to work with our public health partners to release information as it becomes available and will take action when we have the evidence. We are following up on every lead and working with our public health partners to find the source of the *Salmonella* Reading. In the meantime, it's important that consumers know they can purchase and safely consume these products. The U.S. has the safest food supply in the world and USDA works every day to ensure it.

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