



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food  
and Agriculture

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## FACT SHEET

# INSTITUTE OF FOOD SAFETY AND NUTRITION

### OVERVIEW

**T**HE INSTITUTE OF FOOD SAFETY AND NUTRITION (IFSN) leads the research, education, and Extension programs in food safety and nutrition. The American food supply is among the safest in the world, but the nation faces new food safety challenges due to new and emerging foodborne pathogens and because familiar ones are growing resistant to treatment.

As a result, millions of Americans still fall victim to foodborne illness each year. At the same time, millions of Americans struggle to obtain sufficient food, while U.S. food suppliers scramble to keep up with changing food trends. We promote programs that will lead to a safer and sustainable food supply, improve the health and nutrition of all citizens, and reduce childhood obesity. Among the

programs is the Expanded Food Nutrition and Education Program (EFNEP), which improves the diets and food-related behaviors of participants. Each year EFNEP reaches about a million Americans in all 50 states, 6 U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. The institute is comprised of two divisions: the Division of Nutrition and the Division of Food Safety.

**3,000**

The number of people who die each year from foodborne illness

**\$14B**

The yearly direct healthcare cost for childhood obesity

### DIVISIONS

#### DIVISION OF NUTRITION

Good nutrition is vital to the health and well-being of the nation and is essential for the growth and development of children and adolescents. IFSN's Division of Nutrition manages a series of food, nutrition, and obesity prevention programs to help Americans prevent the major causes of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and certain types of cancers that are related to

poor diet and lack of physical activity. NIFA sponsors nutrition-related research and partners with the Cooperative Extension System to deliver nutrition education programs that help consumers in communities all across the nation face the challenges of healthful eating. NIFA nutrition programs also provide policymakers with the knowledge to make appropriate policies for our citizens.

#### DIVISION OF FOOD SAFETY

NIFA food safety programs address complex food safety problems. IFSN's Division of Food Safety manages these complex problems by integrating a variety of food-related disciplines, including microbiology, processing, technology, engineering, chemistry, and toxicology. Contamination of food by microbial and chemical hazards that cause disease and illness in humans can result from any number of diverse factors, from production through consumption—including lack of good agricultural and manufacturing practices. One of the division's objectives is to

increase our understanding of disease-causing microorganisms, their products, and naturally occurring toxicants and chemical contaminants in meats, poultry, seafood, and fresh fruits and vegetables. To help address these issues, the division administers the competitive grant programs that seek to improve the support and coordination of food safety research, education, and Extension/outreach at universities throughout the nation. In addition, the division maintains the Food Safety Contacts Directory to enhance communication and networking among food safety professionals.

# INSTITUTE OF FOOD SAFETY AND NUTRITION (CONT'D)

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## MAJOR PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

### CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Obesity is the number one nutritional problem in America and the prevalence rates for overweight and obesity in children and adolescents have tripled in the past 30 years. Among pre-school children, one-in-eight is overweight or obese, as is one-in-six teenagers. These figures are even more grim for many low-income and minority communities. Food is an integral part of the process that leads to obesity and NIFA has a unique responsibility for the food system in the United States. The childhood obesity prevention program is a crosscutting program that is designed to achieve the long-term outcome of reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children and adolescents.

### HEALTHY FOODS

Consuming a nutritious diet is important for maintaining long-term health. The Division of Nutrition supports activities to expand the body of knowledge about the requirements and functions of nutrients and other beneficial components in food.

### FOOD AVAILABILITY

The Community Food Projects (CFP) program has since 1996 promoted self-sufficiency and food security in low-income communities through CFPs and Training and Technical Assistance projects (T&TA). CFPs unite the entire food system to assess strengths, establish linkages, and create systems to improve self-reliance over food needs. These projects link local food production and processing to the goals of community development, economic opportunity, and environmental enhancement.

### NUTRITION EDUCATION

Poor health disproportionately affects minority and low-income populations. Education opportunities and resources are limited. EFNEP helps limited resource families and youth to attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to change their eating habits and achieve a nutritionally sound diet, which, in turn, improves their overall health and well-being.

### FOOD SAFETY

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans (48 million people) gets sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die from foodborne illness. IFSN's food safety programs use a multidisciplinary approach to reduce the incidence of foodborne illness by supporting research (both basic and applied), education, and Extension activities that address priority food safety issues.

### FOOD QUALITY

Food quality is an important component of food safety; appearance, flavor, and texture are important qualities of food. IFSN's food safety programs help find ways to improve the nutritional quality of food without sacrificing flavor, acceptability, and safety. Food quality programs focus on the development or improvement of methods, techniques, processes, and materials that improve both nutritional and sensory aspects of food and food ingredients. The programs aim to develop and promote improved food processing technologies, to maintain or enhance quality and functionality, to stabilize or preserve foods, or to prepare foods for further processing. They also seek to advance innovative technologies, such as the development of nanotechnology for food applications. Improving analytical characterization techniques of physical, chemical, biological, and sensory factors of food are also key goals of NIFA's food quality programs.

### FOOD SCIENCE

IFSN's food science programs are well-integrated into overall food safety programs. Food science encompasses the development of new food products, the design of processes to produce foods, the choice of packaging materials, shelf-life studies, and sensory evaluations of the products, as well as microbiological and chemical testing. Food science is a highly interdisciplinary applied science that incorporates concepts from many different fields, including microbiology, chemical engineering, and biochemistry.

### SOCIAL SCIENCES AND ECONOMICS

The U.S. food supply is among the safest in the world, but foodborne illness remains a concern. Foodborne illness comes at a tremendous cost and has profound public health impacts. Understanding those impacts, reducing related risk factors, and controlling costs of foodborne illness are critical areas of concern for IFSN's food safety programs. Social and behavioral scientists, statisticians, and agricultural economists are becoming more involved in the multidisciplinary teams that address priority food safety issues. Their involvement and participation have greatly increased the knowledge base about the social, behavioral, and economic factors related to food safety, food quality, and food science.

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

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