



Safe Food for a Healthy Life

An Initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts at Georgetown University

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LIKELY VOTERS WANT FEDERAL PRODUCE SAFETY STANDARDS, DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT BROKEN SYSTEM

Mandatory, enforceable safeguards key to restore consumer confidence

SEPTEMBER 17, 2008 (WASHINGTON, DC) – Likely voters, by a 3-to-1 margin, want the federal government to establish new safety standards for the growing, harvesting, processing and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables even if they increase costs, according to a national survey commissioned by the Produce Safety Project (PSP), an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts at Georgetown University.

Conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies, the survey found deep discontent – 75% of likely voters -- with the current voluntary system: 36% favor “complete overhaul” and 39% want “significant changes.”

“Consumers don’t want the produce section of their grocery stores to be casinos where they roll the dice on their family’s health and safety,” said Jim O’Hara, PSP director. “And they are shocked to learn that their tax dollars are being spent on an honor system. They want cops on the beat.”

The survey was conducted in late July in the wake of the recent *Salmonella* Saintpaul outbreak linked by public health authorities first to fresh tomatoes and then to jalapeno and serrano peppers. As in other recent polls, a substantial percentage of respondents -- fully three in four (75%) -- see produce safety as a serious problem, and a majority say they are worried about bacterial contamination in the produce they serve to their families.

Moreover, they hold the government and the companies that wash and package produce primarily responsible for produce safety, with each of these two sectors singled out by the same percentage of likely voters (41%).

The poll found that a majority of Americans (60%) rated the federal government’s performance regarding produce safety as only fair or poor. To address these concerns, a significant majority (67%) want new safety regulations to be mandatory. More than seven in 10 (72%) likely voters favor the federal government creating new requirements for produce safety even if they would raise the cost of fresh produce by three to five percent.

www.ProduceSafetyProject.org

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“Having 76 million Americans get sick each year from foodborne illness and 5,000 die is unacceptable,” said O’Hara. “And having public health officials tell consumers to eat fresh fruits and vegetables to be healthy while the primary public health agency responsible for produce safety – the Food and Drug Administration -- fails to put in place mandatory and enforceable safeguards, that is unacceptable as well.”

The national survey of 1,002 likely 2008 general-election voters was conducted from July 21 to August 3, 2008 by Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies on behalf of the Produce Safety Project. For a complete summary of study findings, go to www.producesafetyproject.org

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The Produce Safety Project at Georgetown University seeks the establishment of mandatory and enforceable standards governing the safety of domestic and imported produce, that apply from farm to fork. To give American families the confidence they deserve in the safety of the fresh fruits and vegetables necessary for healthy lives requires a federal food safety system with adequate resources that is based on prevention, scientifically sound risk assessment and management, and coordinated and integrated data collection. For more information online, visit www.producesafetyproject.org

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