

An Overview of GAO's Role in Food Safety

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Overview



- GAO's mission
- Major themes of GAO's food safety work
- Selected GAO reports related to food safety

GAO's Mission



As the investigative arm of Congress, GAO's job is to:

- Help Congress ensure that the federal government is operating efficiently and effectively
- Audit agency operations to determine whether federal funds are being spent appropriately
- Report on how well government programs and policies are meeting their objectives
- Investigate allegations of illegal and improper government activities

How GAO Selects Its Work



GAO ranks its requests for work according to:

- Congressional mandates
- Requests from senior congressional leaders and committee/subcommittee chairs and/or ranking members of committees with jurisdiction
- Requests from individual members
- A limited amount of work is self-initiated

GAO Recommendations



- GAO often makes recommendations to agencies as a result of our work
- We follow up on each recommendation for 4 years to see what actions were taken
- We post the status of each recommendation on our Web site

GAO Performance Metrics



- Dollars saved
- Testimonies delivered
- Recommendations made
- Recommendations implemented
- Other accomplishments
- Peer review by external organizations

GAO's High-Risk List

- A list of 30 areas that are at risk for waste, fraud, abuse, or mismanagement. Examples:
 - Medicare and Medicaid
 - Federal agencies' real property holdings
 - Interior's management of oil and gas programs
 - Certain major DOD procurement programs

- Every 2 years, GAO updates Congress on its high-risk list

GAO's High-Risk List



Food safety was added to the high-risk list in 2007 because of the fragmented nature of federal food safety oversight

- 15 agencies involved in food safety
- at least 30 food-related laws on the books
- at least 71 interagency agreements related to food safety activities

Major Themes of GAO's Food Safety Work

Ensuring the Safety of the U.S. Food Supply in a Global Environment:

- Seafood safety
- Food ingredients determined to be generally recognized as safe
- Antibiotic use in animals
- Preslaughter interventions for preventing *E. Coli*
- Food labeling
- Imported food safety
- Fresh produce safety
- Economic fraud (seafood)
- Dietary supplements
- FDA and USDA management challenges

Seafood Safety



Objectives: GAO was asked to assess the extent to which

1. FDA is able to ensure the safety of seafood imports from residues of unapproved drugs
2. FDA and NMFS have implemented a 2009 Memorandum of Understanding

Food Ingredients Determined to be Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS)

Objectives: GAO reviewed the extent to which

1. FDA's oversight of new GRAS determinations helps ensure the safety of these substances
2. FDA ensures the continued safety of current GRAS substances as new scientific information emerges
1. FDA's approach to regulating engineered nanomaterials in GRAS substances helps ensure the safety of the food supply

Antibiotic Use in Animals

Objectives: GAO examined

1. The extent to which agencies have collected data on antibiotic use and resistance in animals
2. The actions FDA has taken to mitigate the risk of antibiotic resistance in humans
3. The actions the European Union and Denmark have taken to regulate antibiotic use in animals and lessons learned

Preslaughter Interventions to Prevent *E. Coli*

Objectives: GAO reviewed

1. Interventions before slaughter that may help reduce STEC in cattle
2. The extent to which STEC strains have been determined to be adulterants in beef and the status of tests to detect them
3. Practices, if any, other countries have employed that could reduce STEC in cattle and may be relevant to the U.S.

GAO Reports on FDA and USDA Management Challenges



- Overseas offices (FDA)
- Federal food safety oversight: food safety working group (FDA, USDA, and OMB)
- Management capacity (FDA)
- Sufficiency of the federal veterinarian workforce (FDA, USDA, Department of Defense)

Other Ongoing and Recent Work in Food Safety and Agriculture

FDA

- Adverse Event Reporting for Dietary Supplements
- Third-Party Certification of Seafood Imports
- Food Recalls

USDA

- Farm Bill Evaluation Framework
- Trade Adjustment Assistance for Farmers
- Animal Disease Surveillance
- Agriculture Quarantine Inspectors
- Pigford II Settlement (USDA)
- Duplication of USDA's Agricultural Research Efforts
- Direct Payments
- USDA Payments to Estates and Deceased Individuals
- USDA Civil Rights Office
- USDA/SBA Disaster Payments
- USDA Budget Justification Review
- Catfish Inspection Program

Summary



- GAO works on behalf of Congress to save taxpayer money and review the effectiveness and efficiency of federal government programs.
- In the area of food safety, GAO focuses mainly on the activities of FDA and USDA and has made numerous recommendations that have improved agency operations.

Contact Information



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