

Food Safety Proposal for Reduction of Food Contamination

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Background

In the film *Food Inc.*, we are presented with several issues involved with the American food industry. One of the many issues within the food industry is food safety neglect. In the occurrence of food safety neglect, foods can become contaminated and negatively affect a person's health, sometimes to the point of death. This was the case for two-and-a-half-year old Kevin Kwoalcyk, who died in August 2001 due to hemorrhagic E.coli as a result of eating a hamburger. Barbara Kwoalcyk, mother of Kevin, hired a private attorney to take action on the matter and have the factory make a meat recall. However, the meat wasn't recalled until August 27th, 16 days after her son had died (Pearlstein & Kenner, 2008). A more direct approach to take action on this matter was attempted more so because the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had no control over shutting down plants; this was Kevin's Law. Kevin's Law would help give the USDA the power to shut down plants that repeatedly produced contaminated food. Although this was a new hope for a step in enforcing more food safety, Kevin's law wasn't passed.

Across the United States, thousands Americans are hospitalized due to several bacterial infections in association to foods. Bacterial infections such as campylobacter and salmonella are caused through consumption of contaminated foods (Ray et al, 2021). Cases of contaminated foods arise from the government's negligence to enforce proper food safety regulations, at times putting the food industry above the people. Not doing something to enforce food safety will have the potential to put the consumers' health into risk. Personally, I myself am a consumer and I sometimes go purchase food with my family whether it be to places such as a fast-food restaurant or the grocery store. The people affected from all of this are our families; women, men, and

children. We purchase foods thinking that what I buy and eat will be safe to consume and won't cause harm to our health and that should always be the case.

Taking this issue into mind, I ask you, the consumers, to help me solve this issue by urging your local government representatives to pass Kevin's Law. You, the consumers have the right to voice your opinions on the matter and we are what keep these food industries going. Our representatives have the responsibility to represent us as the people and our communication with them on certain matters lets them know what particular issues are most significant to us.

Cause of the Problem

Food contamination can happen when there is a presence of microbes and pathogens in the food. For example, campylobacteriosis is a disease caused by poor food handling as well as unsanitary practices. Salmonellosis is also another disease caused by unsafe access to water and food. Symptoms of this disease involve those such as fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (Sharma et al, 2020). As described in the film *Food Inc.*, corn is the main ingredient in feed ingredients for cattle, chicken, and hogs. Cows in particular are designed by nature to eat grass not corn. Food industries feed corn because it's not only cheap but also because it makes them fat. Research shows that a high-corn diet in cows produces E.Coli that are acid-resistant. A certain mutation happens and a strain called E. coli 0157: h7 forms from the corn fed to cattle and from the manure that the cattle stay in daily (Pearlstein & Kenner, 2008). It becomes something sequential, if one cow has this others become infected as well. Unsafe handling as well as unhygienic ways in which the meat is processed lead to its contamination, presenting itself in the food we eat. In the case of Kevin, the meat in his hamburger was tainted and he contracted E. coli 0157: h7 that took his life. The main cause contributing to the problem of food contamination is the neglect of proper food safety regulations. Food industries attempt to gain

profit by implementing cheap and profitable methods of making their products. However, this comes at the cost of putting in danger the lives of the consumers that buy their products.

Effect of the Problem

The consumers as well as their families are affected by the matter of contaminated foods. Women, men, and children are all affected by it. If no solution is offered to solve the issue, the effect will be the increase in bacterial infections such as campylobacter, salmonella, shigella, and listeria. In fact, in 2020, the FoodNet or Foodborne Disease Active Surveillance Network identified 18,462 cases of infection, 4,788 hospitalizations, and 118 deaths. Campylobacter was found to be highest among cases, with a total of 7,208 cases of infection (Ray et al., 2021).

Some short-term effects that can be observed through these food borne illnesses or infections are through their common, temporary symptoms. For example, salmonellosis common symptoms involve headache, nausea, and abdominal pain (Sharma et al., 2020). Long-term effects that can be observed through these infections are more severe complications. For example, botulism is a foodborne illness that in its growth, can create a potent neurotoxin that causes neuromuscular syndrome (Sharma et al, 2020). These food borne illnesses can result in death as well. Shigellosis is a disease that's common in children. Approximately 600,000 children under 5 years of age die because of it. In some cases, certain groups are more prone to these illnesses. A study conducted in Rhode Island found that young children, older adults, people with weak immune systems and pregnant women were more prone to be at a greater risk than others (Barkley et al, 2016). In older adults, the risk was greater for factors such as weakened immune systems and due to a long time frame for bacteria to remain in gastrointestinal tracts. Food borne illnesses that were more likely to be found in people above the age of 65 years were listeria, vibrio, and cyclospora (Barkley et al., 2016). Food borne illnesses or infections can

greatly affect us as consumers and our families because they pose a risk to our health. With the implementation of food safety regulations, it will help enforce greater safety for us.

Solution

. My solution is to have Kevin's Law implemented. Of course, this is a process that can't be done individually, which is why I'm asking you, the consumer, to help me bring to the surface the importance of this law. My goal is to gather your attention on this issue because it affects you, it affects me, and it affects your family as well. The implementation of Kevin's Law I think was a solution was more practical and effective than other solutions because for other options such as the implementation of more effective sanitary procedures or implementation of new upgraded equipment in industries, takes much more time and money to do. This law has been introduced into the Congress as well and its function is known by past committees that have reviewed it. As informed in *Food Inc.*, the USDA has no control over the shutting down of plants and in its effect, gives the possibility of meat or poultry meat to be distributed even though tainted. Industries care about how much profit that they make and how much they are winning without putting into thought any consequences that their actions make (Pearlstein & Kenner, 2008). For example, there are some industries that go to the point of using ammonia to kill any possible bacteria that might form in meat. They are also more likely to get defended than consumers because of their power and the amount of money they make through distribution of our products. This could be seen from the standpoint of the Kwoalcyk family that unfortunately, after advocating for years, could not have Kevin's Law passed (Pearlstein & Kenner, 2008). This law was introduced more than once into Congress. I think that with people placing the importance of this matter more so in large amounts, this law could be once again considered. I believe that the union of the people and addressing this to our representatives will help voice our

concerns. The purpose of representatives here is to be the voice of the people and to enact matters that are important to us. The passing of this law can be a start to ensuring our food system is working to protect its consumers.

Action Plan

Kevin's Law cannot be passed without the help of you, the consumers. As they say, there is greater power in numbers. We, the consumers, have the right to be informed and be protected from foods that might be dangerous to their health. The court case, *Animal Legal Defense Fund v. Otter* clearly showed the aspect of that. In this case, the court ruled in favor of the Animal Legal Defense Fund and stated that the ag gag rule of Idaho was unconstitutional as it restricted free speech part of the 1st amendment of our constitution. Ag gag laws were implemented by several industries to prohibit whistleblowers or activists to reveal any form of information in regards to how animals are treated in factories as well as the conditions of which they were exposed to (Holifield, 2016). Similar to what was presented in the Food Inc. when Carol Morison, a farmer working for Perdue Farms, gave her experience of how chickens were put in inhumane and unsanitary conditions. Industries don't want for us the consumers to know what is done within the factories and how our food is processed (Pearlstein & Kenner, 2008).

Try thinking back to the case of Kevin, who went from being a healthy boy to dead within just 12 days, all due to the consumption of a hamburger. I urge you to take action on this matter. Find your local representative through the website <https://www.house.gov>. You can search on this website how to find your local representative and search by ZIP code. Your representative will vary by location. You can also contact the Clerk of the House or call (202) 224-3121. The Clerk of the House has the numbers of all House members as well as committees. You can also go to your personal representative's website in which you can find more

information about them and their contact information (United States House of Representatives, n.d.). I urge you, the consumer, to contact your local representative to have Kevin's Law be reconsidered again into legislation. In the passing of this law, it will amend some of the USDA's authorities. As explained in *Food Inc.*, it would give the USDA the ability to shut down plants that would continuously produce contaminated foods (Pearlstein & Kenner, 2008). If we work together, we can implement change. Not only for us, but even for future generations that will be faced with this situation as well.

References

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- Ray, L. C., Collins, J. P., Griffin, P. M., Shah, H. J., Boyle, M. M., Cieslak, P. R., Dunn, J., Lathrop, S., McGuire, S., Rissman, T., Walter, E. J. S., Smith, K., Tobin-D'Angelo, M., Wymore, K., Kufel, J. Z., Wolpert, B. J., Tauxe, R., & Payne, D. C. (2021). Decreased Incidence of Infections Caused by Pathogens Transmitted Commonly Through Food During the COVID-19 Pandemic -- Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, 10 U.S. Sites, 2017-2020. *MMWR: Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report*, 70(38), 1332–1336. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.csus.edu/10.15585/mmwr.mm7038a4>
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- United States House of Representatives. Find your representative. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2022, from <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

Annotated Bibliography

Barkley, J., Julian, E., Viveiros, B., Gosciminski, M., & La Bandy, U. (2016). Preventing Foodborne and Enteric Illnesses Among At-Risk Populations in the United States and Rhode Island. *Rhode Island Medical Journal*, 99(11), 25–28. (its an academic journal, peer reviewed)

The points of this article include the people that are more likely to be at risk of food borne illnesses as well as possible recommendations for the prevention of foodborne illnesses. The population of the people at greater risk for food borne illnesses includes children, older adults, and pregnant women. Other factors such as race and ethnicity may contribute to the people affected by food borne illnesses. For example, those of minority groups and who are low-income can most likely be at risk for foodborne illnesses.

This source is part of an academic journal and has been peer reviewed by professionals.

This article provides both statistical information as well as factual information. It provides information for the intended audience to know more on the issue. The overall goal of this article is to analyze risk profiles within the population of Rhode Island.

This source fits into my research topic because it covers information in relation to food borne illnesses or infections. Through use of this source I can provide information of what type of population is affected most and with use of statistical information provide my credibility to the topic.

Holifield, L. L. (2016). Animal Legal Defense Fund V. Otter: Industrial Food Production Simply Is Not a Private Matter. *Journal of Food Law & Policy*, 12(1), 16–52. (academic journal peer reviewed)

The points addressed by this source is a case between the Animal Legal Defense Fund and Butch Otter. The public has the right to know how the food supply is produced. Concerns of this were questioned through the implementation of ag gag laws which punished whistleblowers or activists that were undercover, to reveal the events occurring within factories. The problem with this was that law criminalized audio and video recording at factories. The verdict of the case was that the ag gag statute was unconstitutional under the First and Fourteenth amendments.

This source is part of an academic journal and it is peer reviewed. This source is useful to provide past history in relation to the public's right of what information concerning food industries they are entitled to. This source compares to other sources in its content because it analyzes what factories in which animals are maintained have done in the past to restrict people from knowing what goes out and from factories. This is important as the people affected by it are the consumers of these industries. The goal of this source was to look into a past case that infringed upon the constitutional rights of people.

This source fits into my research as it provides the right that consumers or people are entitled to. This source is helpful as it provides historical data. This can be a way to encourage the intended audience to voice their opinions on the issue of food contamination in lack of food safety regulations.

Pearlstein, E. & Kenner, R. (2008). *Food, INC.* United States: Magnolia Home Entertainment.

This source addresses several issues in relation to the food industry or factories. Some of the topics discussed are factory farming, food safety, and low-income families with limited

access to more healthier food options. It provides information to the public of problems within the U.S. food industry affecting them.

This source is a documentary film and it's non-fictional. The way that this source compares to other sources is that they connect to the situation of why food safety is important. The goal of this source is to reveal to the public the hidden truths within the food production system and how it's affecting workers and farm animals up to us the consumers. This fits my research because it demonstrates some of the consequences that can result from no action being made. This source helps support why the intended audience should take action towards solving the issue at hand.

Ray, L. C., Collins, J. P., Griffin, P. M., Shah, H. J., Boyle, M. M., Cieslak, P. R., Dunn, J., Lathrop, S., McGuire, S., Rissman, T., Walter, E. J. S., Smith, K., Tobin-D'Angelo, M., Wymore, K., Kufel, J. Z., Wolpert, B. J., Tauxe, R., & Payne, D. C. (2021). Decreased Incidence of Infections Caused by Pathogens Transmitted Commonly Through Food During the COVID-19 Pandemic -- Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, 10 U.S. Sites, 2017-2020. *MMWR: Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report*, 70(38), 1332–1336. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.csus.edu/10.15585/mmwr.mm7038a4>

This source provides data on the number of diagnosed infections transmitted by foods. This would include cases of infection, hospitalizations, and the number of deaths. They explain how FoodNet is used to monitor trends and evaluate progress in prevention of infections in the United States. This article is provided through a periodical publication that is issued on a weekly or monthly basis. Like the other sources it provides information on the consequential problem of food contamination in the face of food safety neglect.

This source provides statistical information in association to CDC. The source fits into my research topic because I could include some factual and statistical information from this article to provide credibility to the issue. This will provide who is the number of people affected by food borne illnesses and which are most prevalent among certain groups.

Sharma, S., Mishra, A., Shukla, K., Jindal, T., & Shukla, S. (2020). Food Contamination: It's Stages and Associated Illness. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical, Chemical & Biological Sciences*, 10(4), 116–128. (academic journal peer reviewed)

This source provides an overview of food contamination, the diseases and illnesses associated with it, the process of contamination through various stages, and ways for its prevention. In their research they include a layout of the effects in relation to food safety neglect. This article was published through a scholarly journal that has been peer-reviewed by professionals with experience in a certain field. This article provides several statistics and factual evidence on microbes that can be transmitted through contaminated foods and who is affected by it. This source fits into my research topic because this can be used to inform as well as provide alternatives for what can be done in order to preventative measures of food contamination. The usage of their statistics can help backup claims towards the issue of the damaging problem of microbial contamination of foods in relation to food safety neglect.

United States House of Representatives. Find your representative. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2022, from <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

The point addressed by this source is how a person can find their representative.

Depending on location, each person has a designated representative to speak with on their concerns on a specific matter. It also provides another website that people can visit to find out more about their representative as well as other contact information. Representatives are the voice of the people and through communication with them, certain legislations can be considered. This source is a website for the general public. This source is easily accessible for people to use in contacting their representatives. This source compares with the rest of the other sources as it provides a way in which the people or consumers can contribute and take action upon how they can implement change. The goal of this website is to inform the general public of how they can contact their representatives in addition to allowing the people to know what legislative activity is taking place. This source fits with my research in allowing my intended audience to know how they can help to solve the underlying issue of food contamination. This source provides a way that people can take action to enforce the possibility of better food safety legislation that can protect consumers.