

Proposed Comments for the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Council (DGAC)
Request 5 – 1 Food Safety

Submitted by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) / IFIC Foundation

The International Food Information Council (IFIC) and the IFIC Foundation have assessed consumer attitudes, beliefs and behaviors regarding food safety, safe food handling and consumer trust since 1997. In 2011 and 2012, IFIC assessed attitudes toward chemical contaminants in food with a survey sample of mothers in both quantitative and qualitative studies. The findings are currently in review for publication. Below is a brief summary of the findings from these studies.

In response to Request 5-1 Food Safety, we respectfully encourage the Committee to consider these findings as appropriate during the deliberations.

The IFIC Foundation's Food & Health Survey is a web enabled survey consisting of approximately 1,000 U.S. households. It is a representative sample of U.S. adult population (18+) on age, socioeconomic profile, race/ethnicity, region, and gender. The annual survey is conducted on behalf of the Foundation by external vendors experienced in consumer and market analysis.

The following data points represent consistencies or changes between 2008 and 2013 in the areas of food safety.

- Overall consumer confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply has increased over recent years (45% in 2008; 70% in 2013) even in light of high profile food safety news and alerts.
- Foodborne illness from bacteria is traditionally perceived as the most important food safety issue for consumers, however consumer safe food handling practices continue to lag, especially in regards to the use of food thermometers to check the doneness of meat and poultry products (36% in 2013).
 - 60% of consumers would use a thermometer if they were given one for free
- Consumers trust health professionals (93%), family and friends (76%) and government agencies (64%) to deliver information about food safety. Most importantly, consumers would make a behavior change when recommended by a health professional or government agency.

While foodborne illness from bacteria remains a significant, if not the most important food safety issue, the Food & Health Survey does indicate that other issues are increasing in prominence.

- In 2013, eight out of ten Americans have given at least *a little* thought to the chemicals in their food or foodborne illnesses from bacteria.

- Nearly as many – three-quarters overall – have thought about the safety of imported foods and pesticides.

When aided, chemicals in food ranked as high as 39% as the most important food safety issue (2010); however, when unaided, only 9% of consumers polled (2011) indicated chemicals in food as the most important food safety issue. When asked to specify which chemicals, consumers could not identify any one chemical by name and provided broad, descriptive terms such as “anything artificial”, “certain ingredients”, “additives”, “pesticides” among other non-specific terms.

In 2011 and 2012, IFIC conducted quantitative and qualitative research with mothers to assess their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors toward chemicals in food. Below are several top-line findings which we feel are important to consider in the Committee’s deliberations.

- Some consumers (mothers specifically) consider anything artificial, certain ingredients, including certain nutrients such as fat, sugar and salt as chemicals in food and are therefore perceived as less healthful or nutritious.
- Chemicals in food – BPA, acrylamide, arsenic, etc., are not typically top of mind for mothers and the average consumer.
 - Consumers are likely to be first introduced to chemicals in food by media coverage and biased information within social media networks.
- Mothers are more likely to make a dietary change due to information regarding allergens than the presence of trace levels of chemical contaminants.
- Mothers trust health professionals and government agencies for information about chemicals in food.
- Overall, the majority of the respondents in our survey indicated that quality and affordability outweighed any potential negative perceptions about chemicals in food.

Our research also shows that consumer perceptions and beliefs about food safety extend beyond traditional microbial contamination and safe food handling practices to encompass low levels of naturally occurring compounds in food and other components in food that are not added to food. Typically these compounds in food are not top of mind for consumers, but concern is raised as a result of sustained, misleading news and media coverage.

Food safety data from 2006 – 2010 are published in *Food Protection Trends*, Vol. 32, No. 6, Pages 309 – 326 and is attached. Subsequent surveys are available on the IFIC Foundation web site and via the following attachments.

[2011](#)

[2012](#)

[2013](#)

Additional information regarding consumer attitudes toward chemicals in food and guiding principles to improve public understanding is available via the attached summary presentation, "IFIC Guiding Principles".

These comments are respectfully submitted by IFIC and the IFIC Foundation, March 4, 2014

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The mission of IFIC is to effectively communicate science-based information about food safety and nutrition to health professionals, government officials, educators, journalists, and consumers.

The International Food Information Council Foundation is dedicated to the mission of effectively communicating science-based information on health, nutrition and food safety for the public good. The IFIC Foundation is supported primarily by the broad-based food, beverage and agricultural industries. Visit www.foodinsight.org for more information.