



THE VOICE OF FOOD RETAIL

Feeding Families  Enriching Lives

January 14, 2013

Dear FMI Member,

We live, eat, work, sleep and breathe the importance of food safety. We must do so because we know that if our customers do not consider a food safe, they simply will not buy it. As the foundation to customer loyalty, maintaining consumer trust must remain a prime concern because — as we all know — if customer confidence in the safety of our products is compromised in any way, they have the right, the option and the opportunity to shop somewhere other than our stores.

We are proud of the food safety programs FMI offers its members and the work all of us do to keep America's food supply the safest in the world. Thank you for the key role you play in ensuring food safety remains a top priority, thereby maintaining a high level of commitment to safeguarding our industry's good reputation in this area.

We write today to share a plan to help all of us further protect the health and trust of consumers, specifically centered on a quiet food safety threat in our delis. *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Lm*) is ubiquitous, and thrives in environments that could be perceived as clean, i.e. cold, wet spaces.

To provide a bit of background, a 2003 FDA and USDA Risk Assessment found that while illness resulting from *Listeria* is relatively rare when compared with illness resulting from other bacteria such as *Salmonella*, listeriosis has the highest hospitalization rate and an alarmingly high fatality rate. And in words that should capture all our attention, the risk assessment identified deli meat as the highest risk food.

Fast forward to January 2011, to build on the findings of the risk assessment, the Foundations for both FMI and the American Meat Institute funded two additional study phases with a focus on interventions in delis. The intent was to find solutions to the problem. Beginning in August 2011, preliminary data was collected and presented to FMI's Food Protection Committee and the *Listeria* workgroup. Plans call for the study to be published as early as summer 2013. The Food Protection Committee, under the direction of FMI's Vice President of Food Safety Programs Dr. Hilary Thesmar, has been working diligently to create an action plan based on the research findings.

I implore you to share this action plan with your store managers and deli managers and help us ignite a grassroots effort among FMI members to reduce the prevalence of *Lm* in supermarket delis. The action plan is designed to be simple and to address the issues that require immediate attention in supermarket delis. Dr. Thesmar will soon present the retail food industry's proactive response, including the action plan, at the USDA and FDA Public Meeting on the Interagency Retail *Listeria monocytogenes* Risk Assessment in 2013.

We also look forward to hosting an FMI webinar on the Action Plan February 5, 2013 at 2:00 pm EST. To register, you or your colleagues can visit FMI.org.

After you have the opportunity to review the [Listeria Action Plan for Retail Delis](#), please do not hesitate to contact us with questions and feedback.

Kind regards,

Fred Morganthall
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