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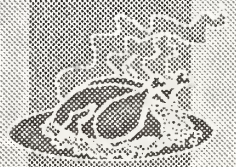
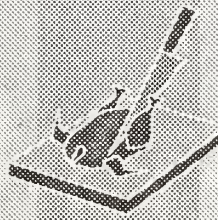
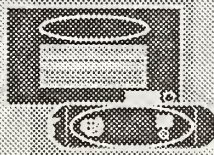
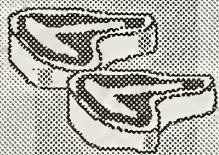
Food Safety
and Inspection
Service

Public
Awareness
Office

Meat and
Poultry
Hotline
Staff

The Meat and Poultry Hotline:

A Tool for the Prevention
of Foodborne Illness



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

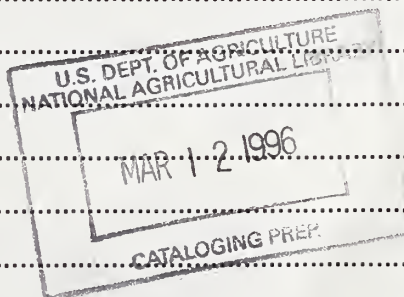


National Agricultural Library

The Meat and Poultry Hotline
A Tool for the Prevention of Foodborne Illness

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The Meat and Poultry Hotline: A Tool for the Prevention of Foodborne Illness

Introduction

Food safety was one of the most consequential issues before the American public in 1989. Frequent and widespread media attention to food-related news stories caused consumers to examine their beliefs and feelings about the food supply. Images of oil-soaked shorelines and embargoed fruits will be long remembered.

Yet the pathogens that cause millions of cases of foodborne illness every year are not always recognized by the public as a hazard, despite the fact that these pathogens are easily controlled through proper food handling. As a result, foodborne illness continues to take its toll in terms of human suffering, medical costs, lost wages, and reduced productivity.

Intervention at the points in the food preparation process where the risk is greatest makes the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Meat and Poultry Hotline an important tool for the prevention of foodborne illness. The hotline, a service of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), is staffed by home economists and registered dietitians. Since July 1, 1985, consumers have received immediate answers to critical food safety questions from the hotline.

Many situations described by callers over the course of hotline history present a clear risk of illness. Callers frequently ask about foods eaten by members of groups at risk for foodborne illness--the elderly, young children, pregnant women, and those weakened by illness. In the fiscal year ending September 30, 1989, the actions most important in preventing foodborne illness (critical control points) were at the heart of most caller questions. Seventy-one percent of callers wanted to discuss these fundamental principles of safe storage and handling. The remaining 29 percent of inquiries comprised questions of a more technical nature, as well as inquiries referred to other agencies.

The 32,000 inquiries received by the hotline from October 1, 1988, through September 30, 1989, are the subject of this report.¹ A section entitled "Issues and Initiatives" describes trends in the nature of the queries, and some of the events that prompted these specific types of questions. A summary of the characteristics and common concerns of the callers follows. The major operational goals of the hotline are discussed, and staff biographies conclude the report. Throughout the report, staff are pictured with some of the many people within FSIS and USDA who assist them in responding to consumer queries.

¹ Of approximately 64,000 people who called the hotline, 38,500 called during regular operating hours; 32,000 were helped by a home economist; 6,500 hung up before they could be helped; and 25,500 called after hours and heard recorded food safety tips. Throughout this report, percentages are based on the inquiries received from those callers helped by a home economist, unless otherwise stated.

Issues and Initiatives, FY 1989

Thanksgiving/Holiday Season

The hotline received over 11,500 calls during November 1988. In order to accommodate pre-Thanksgiving demand, the hotline added 3 business days to its November schedule. Home economists staffed the hotline on the Saturday and Sunday prior to Thanksgiving, and the lines were open from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thanksgiving Day.

Call-handling capability of the hotline was augmented in other ways. A fourth tollfree telephone line was activated and staffing levels were increased.

Improvements in the delivery of educational messages also enhanced the hotline's effectiveness. Beginning in November, callers heard a variety of food safety facts while on hold. During the holiday season, for example, salient points on turkey handling, applicable to critical control points in the home, were presented at regular intervals. This system also supplied interim guidelines to callers who elected to hang up before speaking to a home economist. Longer taped food safety messages were made available to after-hours callers. A record number of consumers phoned the hotline after closing.

Poultry Care and Storage

For the year as a whole, and the holiday season in particular, the dominant issue was poultry care. Consumers were concerned about the length of time poultry products had been kept in their home freezers or refrigerators. Microbiological issues associated with stuffed poultry were explored, and an FSIS advisory on handling stuffed poultry was distributed to retail grocers through FSIS and the Food Marketing Institute.



Hotline home economists Diane VanLonkhuyzen and Grace Cataldo review the ingredients used in shelf-stable meat products with Carl Custer, FSIS Processed Products Inspection Division.

Mail Order Foods

As the popularity of purchasing foods through the mail grows, so does the potential for mishandling of these products. Early in FY 1989, FSIS conducted a campaign to teach consumers and industry how to safely ship and store mail order meat and poultry products. As part of this effort, FSIS worked with the Direct Marketing Association to develop and distribute an advisory to shippers and processors.

Each holiday season has seen an increase in the number of hotline inquiries on these foods, and as a result of this campaign, 1988-89 was no exception.

Many of the concerned consumers had received mail order foods in questionable or unsafe condition. A smaller number sought advice on shipping food gifts via the mails, or transporting them over long distances.

The Year in Review

Egg Safety



Mary Wenberg and Marilyn Johnston, hotline food safety specialists, and Betsy Crosby, home economist, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, evaluate the safety of cooked egg and egg substitute products.

Since 1987, the number of calls to the hotline about eggs has risen steadily. This increase reflects a heightened public awareness of the link between eggs--including clean, unbroken shell eggs--and salmonellosis. The hotline worked closely with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, the lead agency for egg safety programs, to respond to consumers' concerns with the most accurate and up-to-date facts available.

Of the nearly 3,000 egg questions answered in FY 1989, 36 percent referenced microbial contaminants; in particular, Salmonella enteritidis. Sixty-nine percent of all questions on salmonella were related to egg products. Eggs and egg-rich foods, especially those lightly cooked (French toast, soft-cooked eggs, Caesar salads, mousse, etc.) were the foods most associated with salmonella.

A shift from general, sometimes vague queries to more specific, product-oriented queries was evident. For example, awareness of an association between eggs and foodborne illness was gradually supplanted by unease over the use of traditional recipes for foods like eggnog. Meal planners and preparers voiced concern about populations at risk for foodborne illness; e.g., parents asked whether day care providers should offer soft-cooked eggs to their children.

A number of calls on this issue came from food service directors, including those in health care facilities. Dietitians, physicians, and other health professionals also contacted the hotline in greater than usual numbers for egg-handling recommendations.

Fruits and Vegetables

The importance of food safety issues to the American public was underscored during the spring of 1989, when consumers began to question the wholesomeness of the fruit and vegetable supply. At the Department's request, the Meat and Poultry Hotline served to channel information to concerned citizens regarding produce safety.



Karen Tracey, hotline training coordinator, discusses the scientific basis for food handling recommendations with FSIS microbiologist Priscilla Levine.

From March 1, 1989, through April 30, 1989, approximately 300 questions on fruits and vegetables were handled. At this time, three distinct issues were on the minds of consumers: controversy surrounding continued use of daminozide (alar); washing of pesticide-treated produce, and the Department's recommended methods for such treatment; and the discovery of cyanide in Chilean grapes. These three topics accounted for 44 percent of the 300 queries; one-third of callers mentioning a specific food asked about apples or grapes.

Some callers asking about fruit and vegetable issues were referred to the Food and Drug Administration, Cooperative Extension Service, or Environmental Protection Agency for further information.

Food Storage

The storage of food and the handling of leftover portions are practices under direct consumer control that are keys to preventing foodborne illnesses. Storage recommendations, particularly those related to new products or uniquely-packaged foods, assumed greater importance in light of new research on the potential for certain pathogens to multiply at refrigerator temperatures. Because one-fourth of all hotline queries dealt with food storage (refrigerator, freezer, or shelf storage), a comprehensive plan to consolidate available food storage data was implemented. Storage recommendations were also applied to the 3 percent of inquiries arising from power failures.

Product Recalls

When meat and poultry products are recalled, immediate action is taken to inform the public. Recorded messages allow round-the-clock access to vital information such as lot numbers and date codes. Listeners are encouraged to call during regular business hours with further questions. As a result, hotline food safety specialists handled 305 recall queries last year.

Most of the recall queries were received just prior to Thanksgiving 1988, when two companies recalled whole turkeys. Other products of concern were undercooked deli meats and ready-to-eat products possibly contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes.

Emerging Pathogens

While salmonella are the bacteria mentioned most often by hotline callers, other pathogens also concerned consumers. One example

was a particularly virulent strain of E. coli. In the wake of an outbreak of illness linked to precooked hamburger patties, 200 consumers called the hotline. The cases of hemorrhagic colitis, and the associated publicity in national news media, generated these calls.

Inspection Issues

Three percent of FY 1989 inquiries were connected to FSIS programs, including the Meat and Poultry Hotline itself. Consumers had questions about the process of meat and poultry inspection, and the means by which the inspection Acts are implemented. They asked about the efforts undertaken to reduce the level of salmonella bacteria on chickens. Individuals concerned about the labeling of products containing mechanically separated meat also called the hotline.

Two percent of questions specifically addressed the use of antibiotics, growth promotants, pesticides, and other agricultural chemicals. While questions of this type are a small fraction of the total picture, the number of residue/pesticide questions received in FY 1989 rose to over 600.

Following the move by the European Community (EC) to ban imports of American meat from livestock receiving growth-promoting hormones, inquiries became more technical in nature. Callers explored the reasons for the disagreement between the United States and the EC. Some asked about the mechanics of administering the hormones. They requested definitions of terms used in advertising, such as "hormone-free."

Meat and Poultry Labeling



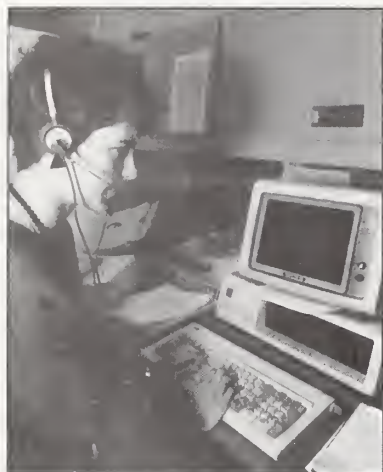
Food technologist Kathleen Leddy, FSIS Standards and Labeling Division, updates Patricia Moriarty and Barbara O'Brien, hotline staff, on agency labeling policies.

Product dating and labeling each accounted for 1 percent of the year's call activity. Interpretations of label instructions influenced the food storage choices made by consumers. For example, callers tended to question the safety of commercial products kept in the home freezer after the sell-by date had passed. Some consumers were angry or concerned because retailers rewrapped and redated products. Curiosity about the legal requirements for open dating and other types of food labeling was apparent.

Calls to the hotline about misleading or erroneous thawing and reheating instructions led the FSIS Standards and Labeling Division to begin a redefinition of the Agency's role in overseeing such label information.

Statistical Summary

Call Volume



Jane Reinsel, hotline food safety specialist, answers consumers' food safety questions.

The Meat and Poultry Hotline is available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. During the past year, nearly 64,000 callers utilized the service. Call volume exceeded that of the previous year by 24 percent. Sixty percent of FY 1989's incoming calls were received during regular business hours (Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.; 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. in November). Many consumers elected to phone in the evenings or on the weekends, when timely, frequently-updated taped safety messages could be heard. Those electing to hang up before speaking with a food safety specialist also received food-handling advice through taped messages.

Messages were related to seasonally popular foods and activities such as picnics; emerging food safety issues including potential danger from raw eggs; and emergency situations, such as product recalls or widespread power outages.

Eighteen percent of all incoming calls were received during November, the hotline's busiest month. Expanded hours, plus an additional phone line, gave home economists the opportunity to speak with 900 additional callers in November 1988, an increase of 20 percent over the previous year.

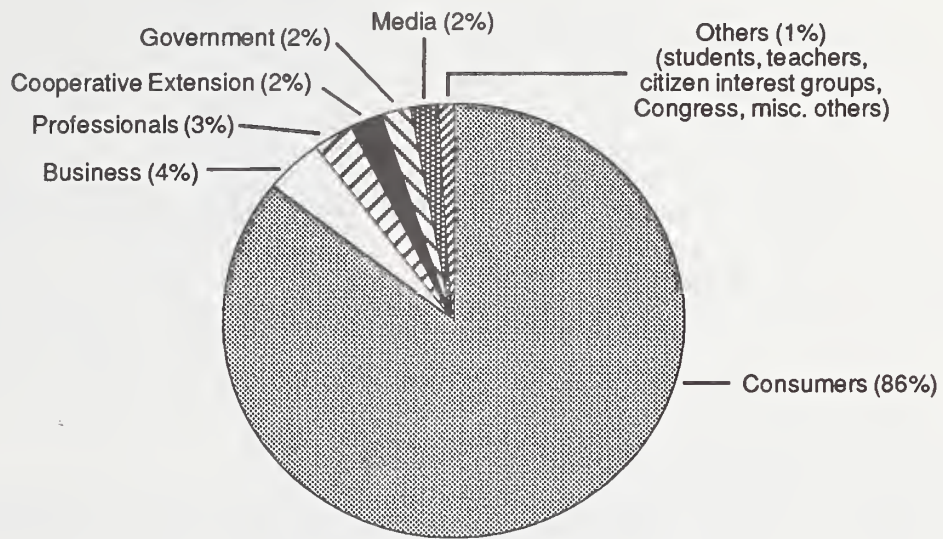
Weekend and holiday call volume fluctuated widely, increasing when the hotline number was publicized by the mass media. Product recalls increased the number of after-hours calls.

Caller Characteristics

The hotline is a consumer-oriented service, and consumers formed the largest segment of the hotline user group. Other users included business people, the media, government employees, including Cooperative Extension agents calling for policy updates; students and teachers, other professionals, citizen interest groups, and legislators (figure 1).

Figure 1

Description of Hotline Callers

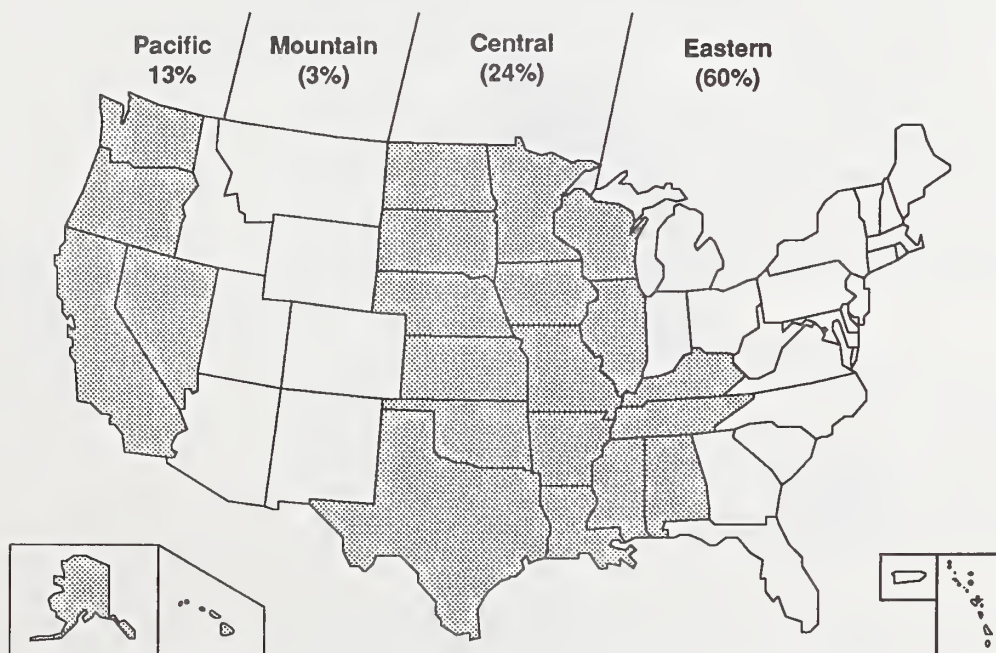


Caller's Home State

Calls were received from all U.S. States, districts, and territories. A total of 14 calls were received from foreign countries, including Great Britain and Canada. In the United States, the majority of calls to the hotline originated in the eastern time zone, followed by the central, Pacific, and mountain zones. (See figure 2.)

Figure 2

Hotline Callers' Home States



Certain States predictably produced a greater number of calls, due as much to the action-oriented nature of their citizens as to population density. The five leading States, accounting for 40 percent of all calls to the hotline, were New York, California, Illinois, Florida, and Pennsylvania. These five States, plus just seven others-- Massachusetts, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, Texas, New Jersey, and Michigan--accounted for 69 percent of all hotline calls.

Source of Hotline Telephone Number

The hotline telephone number appears in diverse publications, from local newspapers to employee newsletters, to nationally distributed cookbooks. Public service announcements and video news releases are used to keep the number before radio listeners and television viewers.

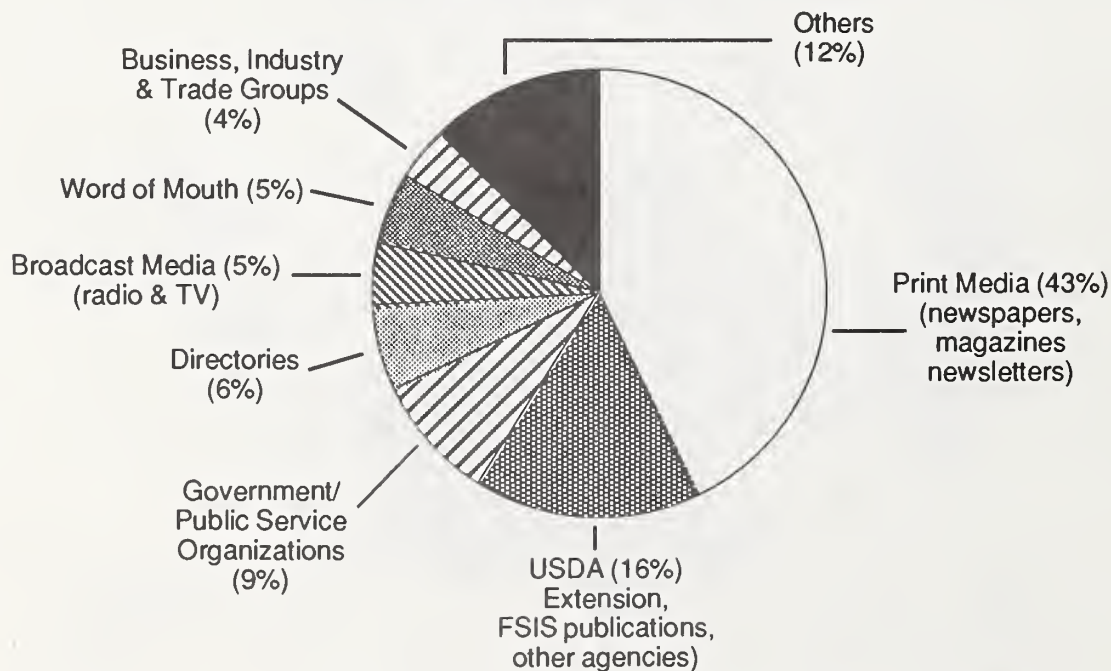
In FY 1989, callers who had used the hotline on at least one previous occasion placed 17 percent of the calls. Compared to FY 1988, repeat callers accounted for a greater share.

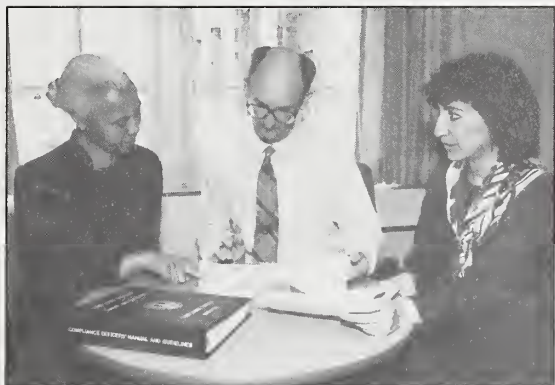
First-time callers obtained the tollfree number predominantly from newspapers (26 percent), magazines (13 percent), and agents of USDA's Cooperative Extension Service (8 percent).

Figure 3 shows the variety of sources cited by first-time callers, grouped by source type.

Figure 3

Source of Hotline Telephone Number: First-Time Callers





Hotline complaint manager Bessie Berry, compliance specialist Wayne Bossler, and hotline home economist Marianne Gravely analyze product complaints taken by hotline staff.

Inquiry Type

Requests for information outnumbered complaints by a wide margin. Food safety queries, publication requests, and information/referral calls combined for 98 percent of the year's total. Less than 1 percent of all inquiries were classified as formal complaints. Approximately 200 complaints were conveyed to FSIS' Compliance Division or Meat-Borne Hazard Control Center for investigation. Of these, three-quarters pertained to one of three topics: foreign objects (35 percent), alleged illness or injury (25 percent), or the appearance, taste, texture, or odor of the food (16 percent).

Complaints of a more general nature were also handled by the hotline. Just over 1 percent of all questions fit this category. Informal complaints were most often about the appearance, taste, texture, or odor of a product. Complaints were also recorded under the headings of product content, conditions at retail stores, product dating and labeling, use of agricultural chemicals, and Agency programs.

Subjects of Inquiry

The HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) system of food safety control functions by identifying and controlling those points in the food production and consumption process where foods are most likely to become contaminated or adulterated. Food handling practices and behaviors, as well as microbial contamination of raw products, determine whether the consumption of a particular product results in illness.

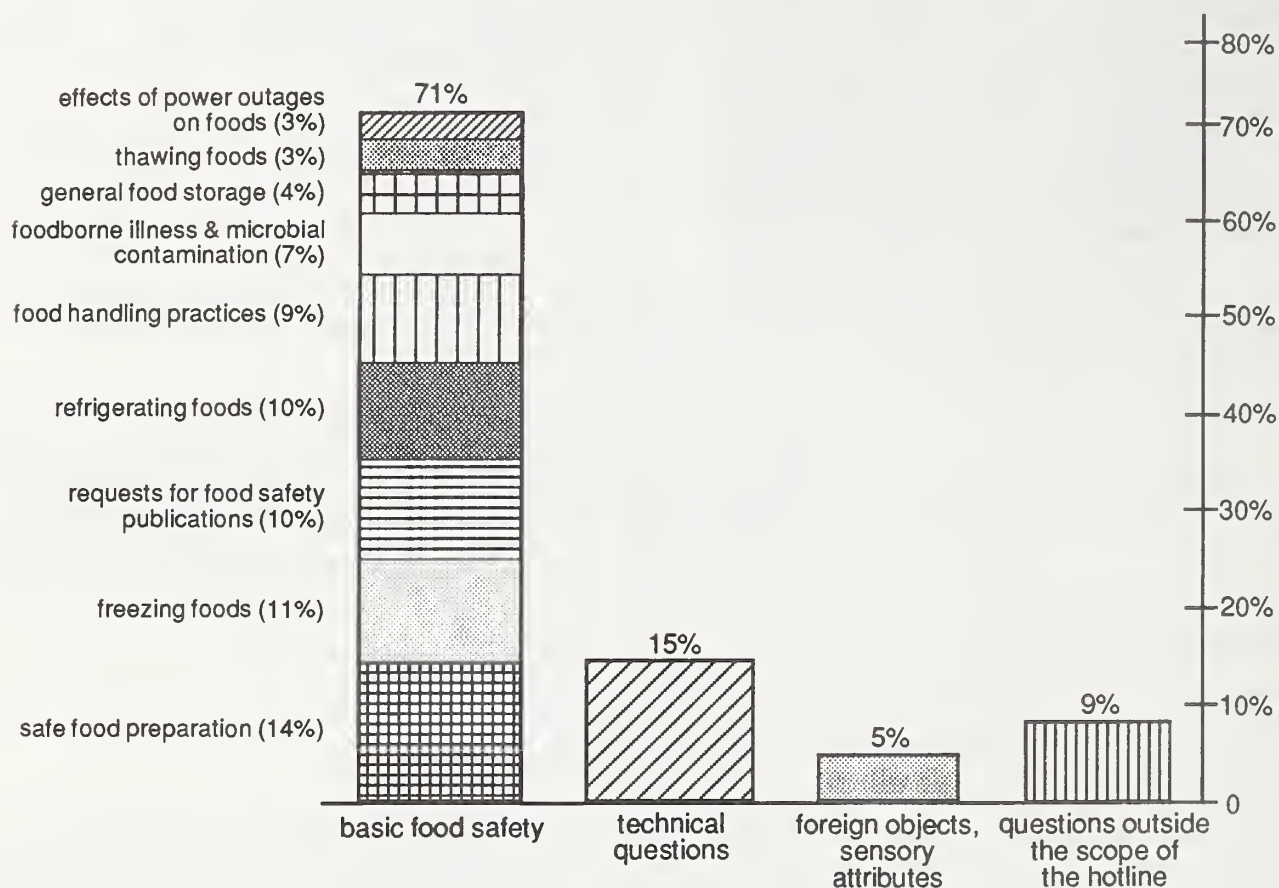
Recent research conducted by FSIS established critical control points in the home that are under the direct control of food handlers.² The majority of questions to the hotline have traditionally focused on these basic but crucial food handling practices, and this trend continued in FY 1989. Seventy-one percent of all inquiries involved one of nine specific topics grouped by the hotline under the heading "basic food safety."

In other words, most users of the hotline sought to learn the fundamentals of safely handling, preparing, and storing meat and poultry products. Consumers asked how to ensure rapid and even cooling of cooked foods. They questioned recipes calling for the long, slow cooking of meats. The safety of foods stored for long periods was a concern of many. Figure 4 shows FY 1989's basic food safety inquiries as a percentage of all hotline inquiries.

²A Margin of Safety: The HACCP Approach to Food Safety Education. Food Safety and Inspection Service, Information and Legislative Affairs, July 1989.

Figure 4

Subjects of Inquiry



Questions of a more technical nature were also addressed by hotline home economists. Fifteen percent of all inquiries were associated with product content, dating and labeling, product recalls, residues of agricultural chemicals, food additives, chemical contaminants, inspection and regulatory aspects of food safety, conditions at stores, packaging, alleged illnesses or injuries from foods, and miscellaneous other topics.

Sensory attributes of food, plus foreign objects, drew in 5 percent of the year's questions. Nine percent of queries were considered to be outside the purview of the hotline, and were generally referred to another agency or organization for resolution.

Foods of Interest

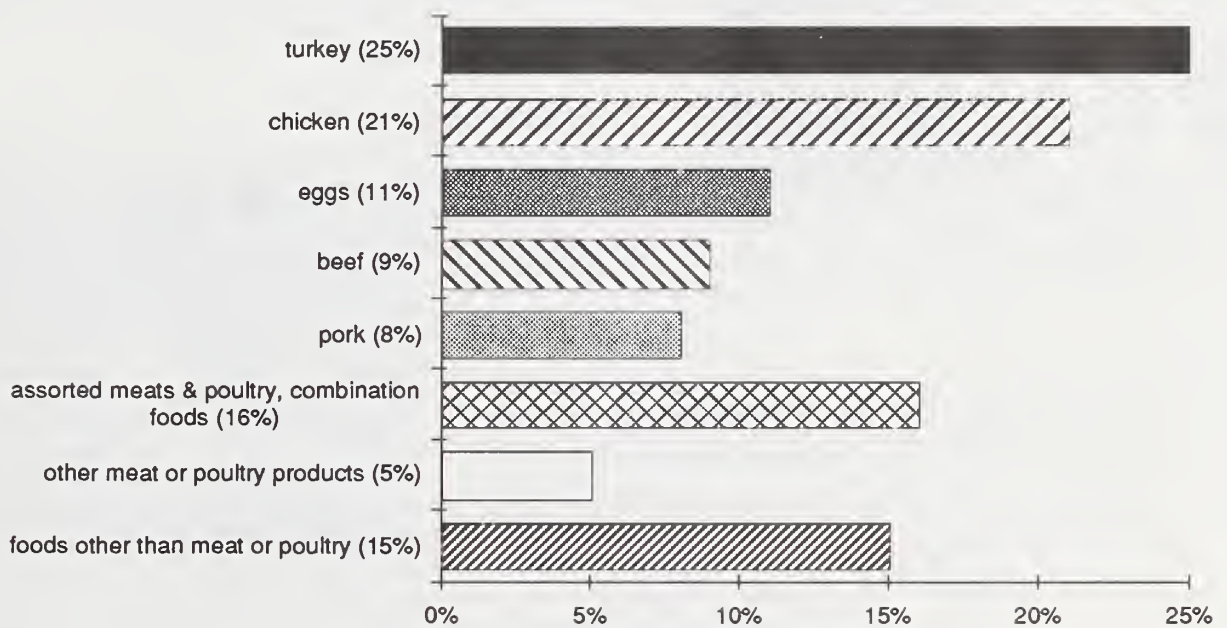
Most hotline callers, 83 percent, expressed their questions in terms of a specific product. Product-specific inquiries were directed mainly toward five categories—turkey (25 percent), chicken (12 percent), eggs (11 percent), beef (9 percent), and pork (8 percent). Sixteen

percent of all queries related to an assortment of foods. Non-meat or poultry products were the subject of 15 percent of all questions, with the remaining 5 percent devoted to infrequently consumed species of meat and poultry, plus various unspecified foods. (See figure 5.)

While callers asked most frequently about fresh, unprocessed foods, there was appreciable interest in canned goods, luncheon meats, ground meats and poultry, and precooked meals or entrees. Two-thirds of the products mentioned were in the homes of the callers at the time of the call; one-third of questions referenced general situations or products yet to be purchased.

Figure 5

Foods of Interest: Product-Specific Inquiries



Disposition of Inquiries Received

The hotline home economists handled 85 percent of all inquiries received. When the subject matter fell outside the range of the hotline mandate, the caller was referred to another source for further information and/or assistance. Three percent of inquiries received were referred to State and local Cooperative Extension offices. Two percent of questions were forwarded to the Food and Drug Administration. The FSIS Meat and Poultry Inspection Operations staff was called upon to resolve 1 percent of inquiries, as were various trade and industry groups. The remaining 8 percent of queries were referred to a number of offices, with half of these assigned to another arm of FSIS or the Department of Agriculture.

As in past years, nearly all inquiries received by the Meat and Poultry Hotline were resolved immediately, with just 300 inquiries requiring additional research.

Operations

Information Resource Management

The growth of the hotline operation in size and scope demanded corresponding improvements in information resource management and systems administration. Redesigned data entry screens brought about significant improvements in data quality. Extensive work was done in the area of systems documentation and computer security.

The information collected was incorporated into speeches, news articles, reports, and an agencywide bimonthly newsletter. Analysis of questions received by the hotline was of great value to those planning educational campaigns and publications.



Linda Burkholder, hotline management analyst, describes trends in consumer inquiries to Ann Chadwick, USDA Consumer Advisor.

Research

In approximately 1 percent of cases, research was required to resolve an inquiry. Reference materials and/or program specialists were consulted, and the consumer received a followup call. In FY 1989, 300 unusual or highly technical questions were researched. The role of the research manager was further defined in order to streamline and centralize the processing of research calls. Changes in the database design laid the foundation for automation of some research-connected tasks.

The risk of consuming specific egg products prepared under known conditions was researched throughout the year. As more was known about the egg safety issue, consumers questioned egg products from beverages to frostings to doughs. Research also helped determine the safety of some specific home-cured or smoked foods in cases where consumers had attempted to duplicate commercial processes. When housewares were damaged in the process of cooking, like the plastic pie plate that melted in an oven full of foods, the risks from ingesting the products were investigated.

Training

The major achievements in staff training were standardization of the hotline training manual and expansion of the existing video tape library. Training tapes cover most aspects of the FSIS inspection and monitoring efforts.

Frequent inservice training sessions were used to apprise staff of emerging food safety issues, enhance interpersonal and telephone skills, and refine day-to-day operations. An agency epidemiologist updated the staff on procedures for investigating reports of foodborne illness. Sessions conducted by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service synthesized current knowledge of the Salmonella enteritidis problem. Management used information gained through on-site visits of other tollfree information lines in the review and evaluation of Meat and Poultry Hotline procedures.

Hotline Promotion



Lynn Wyvill, USDA Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, and Susan Templin, supervisor of the Meat and Poultry Hotline, plan a video news release with a food safety theme.

The hotline telephone number was widely disseminated. While the means of promotion varied, all promotions described the types of questions handled by the hotline, its hours of operations, government sponsorship, and broad availability.

Public service print advertisements were again utilized, particularly to point to extended holiday hours. Print advertisement artwork entitled "Heard it on the Hotline" was later applied to refrigerator magnets. "Hotline Calling" columns, which employed a question and answer format, appeared in each issue of the FSIS magazine Food News for Consumers, and were reprinted in various forms by the media.

As a result of these efforts, the hotline telephone number appeared in hundreds of programs and publications. Often those placing the number had food safety questions, and asked the hotline to verify the accuracy of information to be printed or aired. Recipes safety checks were an example. The hotline supervisor was interviewed by 350 writers, reporters, and editors throughout the year.

The hotline supervisor and the editor of Food News for Consumers traveled to New York to meet with food editors representing eight magazines with a combined circulation of 31 million. The magazines, which routinely publish features on health, nutrition, cooking, and food buying, included hotline information in articles and features.

Radio and television reporters also utilized the hotline's resources. Their stories were aired nationwide on the Cable News Network, the Associated Press radio network, and health-oriented television programs. A British film crew studied the hotline while preparing a story about food safety concerns in Great Britain.

Two public service announcements for radio were produced, distributed, and widely used. Hotline staff took part in the production of satellite-fed video news releases (VNR's). Association of precooked beef patties and illness from a virulent strain of *E. coli* was explored in a VNR. Widespread concern about eggborne salmonellosis prompted a springtime VNR on eggs.

Other groups and individuals that turned to the hotline over the course of the year included the Cooperative Extension Service, utility companies, trade and industry groups, and consumer watchdog organizations.

Outreach Efforts

Members of the hotline team supplemented one-to-one telephone conversations with other forms of food safety education. Publications were distributed to callers upon request, and bulk orders from service and educational organizations were processed through the hotline as well.

Publications, table-top exhibits, and personal expertise were brought by staff members to various conventions. Those attended included the annual meetings of the American Home Economics Association and the American Dietetics Association.

The hotline was featured at the 1989 USDA/FDA Journalists' Conference. The hotline supervisor and public awareness office chief delivered a presentation, "What Puzzles People about Food?," that answered this question with numerous examples from the Meat and Poultry Hotline and pilot food safety hotline.

Home economists also spoke to local service organizations, such as senior centers and Salvation Army groups, about food safety issues. During National Consumers Week, demonstrations by an experienced microwave consultant on the hotline staff were used to teach safe methods of microwave cooking. A bulletin board, updated frequently to coincide with seasonal concerns or news events, was a well-received addition to the hotline environs.

Special Projects

Hotline staff developed a scheme for identifying critical control points in food acquisition, serving, storage, and preparation that are under direct control of home food handlers. The hotline assisted in evaluation of advice statements emerging from a comprehensive review of these processes by a team of microbiologists. Since many hotline callers engage in behaviors linked to foodborne illness, hotline food safety specialists lent a unique perspective to this project.



Wells Willis, USDA Cooperative Extension Service, and CiCi Williamson, Meat and Poultry Hotline, exchange ideas for effective consumer education programs.

Staffing Structure

A Supervisory Technical Information Specialist, a home economist, oversees the hotline. Two senior staff members serve as front line supervisors, directing call-handling functions, research, complaint management, and staff training. The staff also consists of a management analyst, five part-time technical information specialists, and five temporary-intermittent technical information specialists who staff the line when call volume is high.

Conclusion

In the year ending September 30, 1989, a record 64,000 calls for food safety advice were answered. The Meat and Poultry Hotline worked to prevent cases of foodborne illness by equipping consumers with the knowledge to make correct food-handling decisions. The hotline was an objective and authoritative source of information on the safe storage and preparation of food, the accurate labeling of food, and the options available when food products failed to meet standards of safety or quality.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service ensures that the American public enjoys the safest food supply in the world. The knowledge of consumer beliefs and practices gained by the Meat and Poultry Hotline staff during fiscal year 1989 will be used to support the agency's mission in the decade to come.

Meat and Poultry Hotline Staff

Bessie Jones Berry

Bessie Jones Berry, home economist, has been with the Meat and Poultry Hotline since June 1986. She serves as one of the front line supervisors, as well as the research and product complaint manager. She has a bachelor of science degree in home economics from the University of Maryland, and a master's degree in consumer affairs from Howard University in Washington, DC, that included an internship in the White House Office of Consumer Affairs. She has taught foods and nutrition courses in the public schools. Ms. Berry is originally from Guthrie, Oklahoma.

Linda Burkholder

Linda Burkholder is the Meat and Poultry Hotline management analyst. She is responsible for analyzing calls that come into the hotline to identify trends and to determine needs for consumer education. Ms. Burkholder started with the hotline in 1987 answering consumer calls. She has six years' experience as a home economics teacher in public schools and has taught food preparation at the college level. She received a bachelor of science degree in home economics education from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia and a master of science degree in home economics (nutrition education and human services) from Hood College in Frederick, Maryland.

Grace Cataldo

Grace Cataldo, certified home economist, is a newcomer to the Washington area and the hotline. She received a bachelor of science degree in home economics education from New Mexico State University. She previously was a public health nutritionist in New Mexico and El Paso, Texas, supervising local WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) nutrition clinics. Ms. Cataldo demonstrated microwave ovens and small appliances in department stores and has given food preparation classes. She also worked 3 years for the Monterey, California Independent School District.

Marianne Gravely

Marianne Gravely, home economist, has a bachelor of science degree in home economics with an emphasis in foods and nutrition from Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. She has worked as a public health nutritionist and supervised a WIC nutrition program in Virginia. Previously, she was a home economist for the Yokusoka Naval Base in Japan. She is currently working on a master's degree in nutrition from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg.

Marilyn Johnston

Marilyn Johnston, home economist, received a bachelor of science degree in home economics from Purdue University in Indiana and worked as a home economist for several public utilities in that State before moving to the Washington, DC area. She has extensive knowledge of microwave cooking, having taught classes for the past 12 years. In addition to answering calls, she is working on publishing a cookbook.

Patricia Moriarty

Patricia Moriarty has been a home economist on the hotline since July 1988. She has extensive experience in community nutrition education and health promotion programs. She previously worked for the National High Blood Pressure Education Program and was with the Greater Cincinnati Nutrition Council for 9 years. Ms. Moriarty has a bachelor of science degree in nutrition from Notre Dame College in Cleveland, Ohio, and a master of education degree from the University of Cincinnati. She is also a registered dietitian. Ms. Moriarty is active with the American Dietetic Association as a volunteer for marketing, public relations, and media communications programs.

Barbara O'Brien

Barbara O'Brien received a bachelor of science degree in home economics from Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods College in Indiana and completed her dietetic internship at Walter Reed General Hospital in Washington, DC. A registered, licensed dietitian, her experience has been in hospitals and nursing homes. In addition to working on the hotline, Ms. O'Brien is involved in the production of nutrition education videos for Montgomery County (Maryland) Community Television.

Jan Ostby

Jan Ostby was recently employed at the Food and Nutrition Information Center, National Agricultural Library, as a reference nutritionist. She received a master of science degree in community nutrition from the University of Maryland, College Park. Ms. Ostby has also participated in a variety of inservice practicums which included training in corporate health promotion and public health nutrition. A native of California, Ms. Ostby earned a bachelor of science degree in soil science from the University of California and was briefly employed with the USDA Forest Service in that State.

Jane Reinsel

Jane Reinsel, home economist, received a bachelor of science degree in human nutrition and foods from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and taught cooking classes across the South for 3 years before returning to the Washington, DC area. Ms. Reinsel has appeared on radio and television shows conducting food demonstrations and answering consumers' food questions. In addition to answering hotline calls, she writes articles and develops recipes for magazines and cookbooks. She is active with the National Capital Area Home Economists in Business.

Susan Templin

Susan Templin, as supervisor of the Meat and Poultry Hotline, is responsible for the activities of a management analyst and the full-time, part-time, and on-call home economists who answer hotline phones. She serves as media spokesperson for the Meat and Poultry Hotline, is featured on radio and television programs, and is often quoted in newspaper and magazine articles. She also writes for the FSIS magazine Food News for Consumers. Prior to joining the hotline in 1985 as a home economist, she was director of sales for a food company. She also has 10 years of experience in retail store management and has supervised a USDA-sponsored day care nutrition program. Ms. Templin, who has a degree in home economics from the University of Maryland, has also conducted cooking and microwave-use classes.

Karen Tracey

Karen Tracey serves as the hotline training manager working on the design and development of training materials for hotline staff, in addition to serving as a front line supervisor. She has been with the hotline since 1986, when she moved to Washington, DC after having been a secondary home economics teacher in Kansas for 8 years. She has a bachelor of science degree in vocational home economics education from Central Missouri State University. She has worked for the city of Independence (Missouri) Youth Employment/Life Skills Program. Ms. Tracey is currently pursuing a master's degree.

Diane VanLonkhuyzen

Diane VanLonkhuyzen, home economist, has a varied background in the field which includes a position as consumer advisor to a major utility company in the Washington, DC area. For 9 years she ran a test kitchen developing recipes for the company's cookbook, and conducting cooking and energy conservation demonstrations in the community. Ms. VanLonkhuyzen has also served as a consultant to numerous appliance manufacturers. She has been with the hotline since September 1986, and has a bachelor of science degree in home economics from the University of Maryland. Diane coordinates a variety of special projects for the hotline.

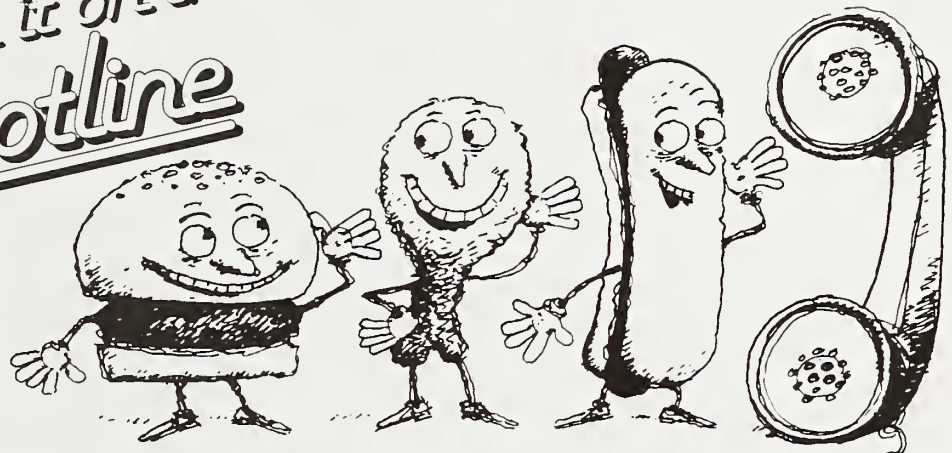
Mary Wenberg

Mary Wenberg received a bachelor of science degree in foods and nutrition from Ohio University and completed a dietetic internship and master of science degree from Ohio State University. A registered, licensed dietitian, her experiences include hospitals, university teaching, and school food service. Ms. Wenberg was professionally employed in Ohio, West Virginia, Minnesota, and Texas before moving to the Washington area. She is an active member of the American Dietetic Association.

CiCi Williamson

CiCi Williamson, certified home economist, brings expertise in the field of microwave cooking to the hotline. In addition to answering consumer calls, she is a syndicated newspaper columnist and author of three microwave cookbooks. Her articles have appeared in Food News for Consumers, professional journals, and women's magazines. She has taught microwave seminars for 14 years. Ms. Williamson is president of both the International Microwave Power Institute's Cooking Appliance Section and the National Capital Area Home Economists in Business. She is a member of Les Dames d'Escoffier and the Newspaper Food Editors and Writers Association. Her bachelor of science degree in home economics education is from the University of Maryland.

Hear it on the Hotline



To hear the latest food safety information, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline

1-800-535-4555

10:00 am-4:00 pm
Eastern Time
(Washington, DC 447-3333)

Professional home economists will answer your questions about proper handling of meat and poultry, how to tell if it is safe to eat, and how to better understand meat and poultry labels.

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