



USDA/FSIS Public Meeting:
Exploring Practical Strategies To Reduce Salmonella in Poultry Products
Session 3: Alternative Parameters for Performance Standards
January 14, 2025

Oral Comments by Dr. Michael Hansen

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. My name is Michael Hansen, Senior Scientist with Consumer Reports.

According to the CDC, *Salmonella* is a leading cause of foodborne illness—1.3 million illnesses and 238 deaths annually – and poultry account for roughly 25%, according to Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration (IFSAC).

Clearly, action needs to be taken to reduce the illnesses caused by *Salmonella* contaminated poultry. We urge FSIS to take the following actions.

First, FSIS should reverse their decision to delay verification activities related to *Salmonella* in NRTE breaded stuffed chicken products. FSIS said they were delaying implementation of verification activities, because “the current available test methods have accuracy limitations and have resulted in false positives, especially at low levels of contamination,” e.g., 1 CFU/g. This statement is inaccurate. In fact, the May 2024 Final Determination noted that a verified test does exist: “FSIS laboratories performed a thorough verification of validated methods by independent organisations. FSIS’ current qPCR method is validated for 1 CFU/g in NRTE breaded stuffed chicken products.” That method is the BioMerieux GENE-UP QUANT *Salmonella* Test Kit, which has been validated by

AOAC. So, there is a validated method that does not have accuracy problems at 1 CFU/g.

Second, FSIS should set an enforceable standard of poultry products (chicken parts, comminuted chicken, and comminuted turkey) that is the same as for the NRTE breaded stuffed chicken products, e.g., 1 CFU/g. Why? Because the two legal arguments that FSIS used for NRTE breaded stuffed chicken products final determination are attributable to other poultry products as well.

FSIS argued that levels of 1 CFU/g or higher in NRTE breaded stuffed chicken products meet the definition of “added substances”, due to cross contamination that happens during processing, citing *United States v. Anderson Seafoods*. FSIS sampling data clearly shows that *Salmonella* poultry rates rise as poultry is further processed, from chicken carcasses at 4.14% to chicken parts at 7.62% to comminuted chicken at 24.2% in FY 2022. Clearly, cross contamination is happening at processing, meaning that the *Salmonella* in all processed poultry products meets the “added substance” provision of the PPIA.

FSIS argued that the 1 CFU/g or higher level of *Salmonella* in NRTE breaded stuffed chicken products meets the more stringent “ordinarily injurious to health” standard of the PPIA. FSIS noted, there are numerous studies that show that very low doses of *Salmonella* can cause illness. Those studies were not done on NRTE breaded stuffed chicken products, so should be applicable to other processed poultry products as well as chicken carcasses. Thus, all these products would meet the more stringent “ordinarily injurious to health” standard.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.