



Food safety is something of a step-child of U.S. regulation. The public obviously cares about it, but it lacks the kind of attention from advocacy groups that the environment gets. The results have not been pretty.

Food safety is divided between the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (for meats and poultry). Keep in mind that USDA's main mission is promoting the agriculture industry, so you have to wonder how zealous they are about regulation. The USDA maintains an inspector at every slaughterhouse and poultry processing plant. But the number of inspectors per billion pounds of meat has fallen by half. Under Bush, FDA lost more than 400 inspectors, and food safety inspections dropped twenty percent below 1972 levels.

The Food Safety Modernization Act of 2010 strengthened FDA's enforcement powers and expanded its regulatory mandate. But, in a common story for the Obama years, FDA's implementation efforts got stalled by the White House regulatory overseers. In the meantime, food safety regulation is on the GOP's hit list. Somewhat surprisingly, considering it's something the public cares about deeply, food safety doesn't seem to have many friends in Washington.

As I said, the results have not been pretty. As the [NY Times](#) reported last week, "salmonella on chicken has officially sickened more than 300 people (the Centers for Disease Control says there are 25 illnesses for every one reported, so maybe 7,500) and hospitalized more than 40 percent of them, in part because antibiotics aren't working." As of Friday, however, the government still hadn't issued a recall.

The government [says](#) that it needs to tie the contamination to particular production runs before it orders a recall. In the meantime, you might want to know that the affected brands are Foster Farms, Eating Right, Kirkland Signature, O Organics, Open Nature, Ralphs, Safeway Farms and Simple Truth Organic. On the other hand, Costco has done its own recall.