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## Iowa Voters' Attitudes On Food Safety

*Findings from a statewide survey of registered voters, conducted by  
Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies*

### Key findings from this survey

The vast majority of Iowa's voters support new federal food safety legislation. Individual measures enjoy very strong support, particularly requiring other countries to certify their own food safety systems; increasing FDA inspection frequency of food facilities; and requiring a tracing system that would allow the FDA to track contaminated food back to its source. More than 40% of Iowans worry at least somewhat about the safety of the food they eat, and half have lost confidence in the safety of food. Far from being a partisan issue, voters across the political spectrum agree that the federal government should be responsible for ensuring that food is safe to eat.

### Fully nine in 10 Iowa voters support the federal government putting new safety measures into place.

- 90% of voters support the government putting a battery of new safety measures into place, including 58% who *strongly* support this. Support is high across the board, regardless of age, gender, or economic status. There are not even divisions down partisan lines, with 95% of Democratic voters, 82% of Republican voters, and 93% of "swing" voters supporting this.
- Support for individual measures similarly is very high. Nine in 10 voters or more favor:
  - Requiring foreign countries who export to the U.S. to certify that their food safety systems are as strong as ours (94%).
  - Requiring the FDA to inspect food facilities every six to 12 months (91%).
  - Requiring tracing systems that enable the FDA to trace food back to its source (93%).
  - Requiring food companies to test for contamination and report results to the government (90%).
  - Requiring that produce growers meet standards for water quality, manure use, and worker sanitation (90%).

Support for requiring food companies to pay an annual fee of \$500 per facility to help fund FDA food safety activity is somewhat lower, but still very robust at 67%.

(cont'd)

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- Iowans, in fact, so support these measures that fully 74% say it would be worth it to pay 3% more in grocery costs to have these new safety measures—this is just as true among lower-income voters (78% worth it) as it is among higher-income voters (75% worth it).

### **Voters are adamant that these measures should be mandatory.**

- Two out of three (64%) Iowans say that these measures should be mandatory because it will ensure that all food businesses are meeting the same safety standards.
- 34% would prefer the measure be voluntary because food businesses already are required to meet many standards, and food safety is in their best business interest anyway.

### **Four in five Iowans say the federal government should be responsible for ensuring that food is safe to eat.**

- 81% of voters say the federal government should be responsible, compared with 13% who say it should not be responsible for food safety.
- Voters across the board hold this belief, regardless of their gender, age, income, or area of residency. Again, partisanship plays virtually no role here—89% of Democratic voters, 74% of Republican voters, and 80% of “swing” voters say the government should be responsible.
- Voters especially are focused on the safety of imported foods—53% say the federal government is doing too little to ensure that food produced in other countries and sold in the U.S. is safe from contamination. They are somewhat less focused on domestically produced food, with 32% saying the government is doing too little to ensure safety in this area.

### **While not a top-of-mind concern for all Iowans, many say they have lost confidence in the safety of the food they eat.**

- Two in five (41%) voters say that bacterial contamination of food worries them a great deal or somewhat; 38% say it does not worry them that much, 21% say they are not at all worried.
- Still, half (49%) of all voters say that what they have seen and heard over the past year has made them less confident in the safety of food sold in the U.S.; just 16% are more confident, and 32% say it has made no difference. Confidence has dropped further among senior citizens, with 55% saying they are now less confident.

*These findings are derived from a statewide survey of 511 registered voters, conducted August 10 through 12, by Hart Research Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) on behalf of the Pew Charitable Trusts and Produce Safety Project. Respondents were randomly drawn from a list of all registered voters in the state, and were interviewed by telephone. The results of the poll are statistically representative of the opinions of voters statewide, and carry a margin of error of  $\pm 4.3$  percentage points for the full sample, and higher margins of error for subgroups of the sample. Full survey results are available at [www.MakeOurFoodSafe.org](http://www.MakeOurFoodSafe.org).*