

Hart Research Associates / Tarrance Group

Iowa 3rd Voters' Attitudes On Funding For The FDA

Findings from a survey of likely voters in Iowa's 3rd Congressional District, conducted by Hart Research Associates and The Tarrance Group

Key Findings From This Survey

By an overwhelming margin, voters favor continuing to provide the Food and Drug Administration additional funds to carry out its new food safety responsibilities.

- After hearing that in the past two years FDA has received \$92 million for these new responsibilities, and that this amounts to five percent of FDA's food safety budget, nearly three in four voters (73%) in the district say they favor having a similar funding increase for 2013. This includes a 40% plurality who *strongly* favor this.
- By comparison, 22% oppose such a funding increase, including just 10% who strongly oppose it.
- Indeed, a majority (51%) of voters say they would be more confident in the FDA's ability to monitor the safety of the food supply if the agency received this funding increase, while 3% would feel less confident.

It is notable that, despite the politically polarized atmosphere in Iowa and the nation, support for additional FDA funding crosses party lines.

- Support for additional food safety funding is shared by 90% of Democrats, 59% of Republicans, and, importantly, 72% of independents.
- Additionally, more than 70% of voters in all age groups and income groups favor this idea.

Half of the district's voters feel that government currently does too many things, and yet even these voters favor additional FDA funding and believe that food safety is government's responsibility.

- Voters in the district are divided on the overall role of government—50% say government currently does too many things that are better left to businesses and individuals, while 43% say government should be doing more to meet people's needs.
- Yet voters clearly view food safety differently, saying this is something that is very much within government's purview. Eighty-three percent (83%) of voters overall say the federal government should be responsible for ensuring food is safe to eat.
- Even those voters who think that government is doing too many things overwhelmingly believe food safety is the federal government's responsibility—72% say this is the case, and 60% of them favor the funding increase.

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In addition to favoring a funding increase generally, voters support charging food importers a fee to help cover costs associated with ensuring imported food is safe.

- More than four in five voters (85%) in the district say they favor charging such a fee to food importers for this purpose, including 45% who strongly support it. Just 11% oppose this.
- Again, this opinion is held across the political spectrum—89% of Democrats, 86% of independents, and 81% of Republicans favor this fee (though Democrats are more likely to strongly favor it than the other two groups).

When read arguments for and against the additional FDA funding, voters side with those advocating for the funding by two to one.

Survey respondents were read one of two pairs of statements. Each pair presented a point of view of supporters of the funding and opponents of the funding. In each case, respondents were much more likely to say they agree with supporters than opponents, as shown below.

SUPPORTERS say that any food price increase likely would be less than one percent and that this small increase is worth it because we need the new requirements and increased inspections of our food supply in order to ensure that our food is safe to eat – **66% agree**

OPPONENTS say these new requirements will drive up food costs for consumers and that is the last thing we need when people are already struggling to make ends meet – **27% agree**

SUPPORTERS say that this is about the essential role the FDA plays in keeping consumers safe in areas ranging from food to drugs to cosmetics to medical devices. The FDA needs adequate funding to do its job and keep consumers safe – **62% agree**

OPPONENTS say this FDA funding increase just creates more regulations and more government bureaucracy at a time when the federal government is already spending too much money and is running a huge deficit – **30% agree**

The Bottom Line: In a presidential election year where virtually every issue is “hyperpartisanized” and voters can find very little upon which to agree, food safety is a clear exception. Simply put, this is not a political issue, but one in which the public sees the government as having an abiding responsibility—they say this is what government *should* do. And in an environment where government spending is routinely derided, the level of support for increasing the FDA’s funding so that it may enforce the relatively new food safety rules is surprising and impressive.

These findings are derived from a landline and cell phone survey of 404 likely November 2012 voters conducted from August 11 to 13, 2012, by Hart Research Associates (D) and The Tarrance Group (R) on behalf of the Pew Charitable Trusts. The results of the poll are statistically representative of the opinions of likely voters in the newly apportioned Iowa 3rd Congressional District, and carry a margin of error of ±4.9 percentage points for the full sample, and higher margins of error for subgroups of the sample.