

Voters' Attitudes On Funding For The FDA

*Findings from a national survey of likely voters, conducted by
Hart Research Associates and American Viewpoint*

Key findings from this survey

By better than two to one, likely voters favor a 5% increase in annual funding for the FDA so that the agency can carry out the new food safety-related activities mandated in last year's food safety bill. Notably, majorities of all partisan groups favor this funding increase.

- Two-thirds (66%) of voters favor increasing the FDA's funding by \$183 million annually—a 5% increase—so that the FDA can engage in the new activities mandated in last year's food safety bill. Twenty-eight percent (28%) *strongly* favor this. By comparison, 30% oppose it (15% strongly so).
- Better than 60% of voters in all regions of the country support this funding increase, as do voters in all area types, including 60% of rural residents. This level of support also is consistent across gender, age, education, and income.
- Majorities across the partisan spectrum also favor this—82% of Democrats, 61% of independents, and 53% of Republicans. A significant bloc of Tea Party supporters—44%—favor this increase, while 53% of Tea Partiers oppose it.

Support for the FDA's new food safety-related authority is extremely high.

Large majorities of voters favor each of the FDA's new responsibilities that this funding increase would enable. More than 80% favor each of the items below, including more than 60% who *strongly* favor each one.

- Ability to issue mandatory recalls and detain food deemed unsafe – 93% favor
- Requiring foreign countries that export food to the U.S. to certify that their food safety programs are as good as those in the U.S. – 90% favor
- Ensuring FDA inspectors have ability to access food company records related to food safety – 91% favor
- Requiring produce growers to meet national standards for water quality, manure use, and worker sanitation – 90% favor
- Ensuring the FDA can enforce new requirements on food companies to identify points of contamination and employ measures to avoid contamination – 91% favor
- Creating a pilot program for a new food tracking system – 88% favor
- Having FDA increase inspections of food facilities – 86% favor

(cont'd)

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Voters are so supportive of these measures that most say they are worth having higher food prices, and a large majority say food companies should help pay for the new measures as well.

- Three in four (74%) voters say that having these new measures in place would be “worth it” even if they increased the cost of many foods by one to three percent. Just 18% say it is “not worth it”.
- This is especially significant given the increase in food prices over the past 12 months, and it is notable that this sentiment crosses economic lines: three-quarters or more of lower-income (78%), middle-income (77%), and upper-income (74%) voters say these new measures are worth higher food prices.
- Moreover, there is a strong belief that food companies should help fund these FDA activities—70% favor requiring food companies to pay an average annual fee of \$1,000 per facility to help fund these efforts (including 45% who *strongly* favor this), while 24% oppose such a fee.
- This idea has support across the partisan spectrum—82% of Democrats, 72% of independents, and 56% of Republicans favor requiring food companies to pay this fee. A majority of Tea Party supporters (56%) favor this as well.

Voters, including those who generally think government should have a smaller role, overwhelmingly see ensuring food safety as being the federal government’s responsibility.

- It comes as no surprise that there is a real divide in public attitudes about the government’s role—53% say that government should do more to solve problems, while 42% say it is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals. There is, of course, a strongly partisan aspect to this, with Democrats strongly in favor of government doing more (80%), Republicans nearly as strong in their belief that it does too much (73%), and independents divided down the middle.
- But there is strong agreement among voters that ensuring that food is safe to eat is something for which the federal government should have responsibility—85% say this is the case, including 94% of Democrats, 81% of independents, and 77% of Republicans. Among voters who say the government is doing too many things, 73% still say the federal government should be responsible for ensuring that food is safe to eat. Two in three Tea Party supporters (67%) agree on this point. Eleven percent (11%) of voters say it is not the government’s responsibility.

The Bottom Line: Voters strongly believe that food safety is the federal government’s responsibility. Despite the current political environment, with the public debate focused on the national debt, the federal deficit, and the role of the government, voters strongly endorse increasing funding for the FDA—with most saying it is worth higher food prices and that they support additional fees for food companies—so that it may carry out this responsibility.

These findings are derived from a national landline and cell phone survey of 1,015 likely voters conducted April 28 through May 4, 2011, by Hart Research Associates (D) and American Viewpoint (R) on behalf of the Pew Charitable Trusts. The results of the poll are statistically representative of the opinions of likely voters nationwide, and carry a margin of error of ±3.1 percentage points for the full sample, and higher margins of error for subgroups of the sample.