

Safe Tables Our Priority



NEWS

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"We are living proof of American industry's failure to provide meat that will not injure and kill...We reject the limited notion that food safety is a partisan issue. We've learned that O157:H7 doesn't select political affiliation, socioeconomic or education level of its victims. We are realists who cannot be coopted by industry to agree with its immoral position that a certain number of U.S. children, elderly and immune compromised are simply expendable to our current system."

*– S.T.O.P. cofounder
Mary Heersink, 1994.*

**S.T.O.P.
SAFE TABLES OUR
PRIORITY**

Spring 2002



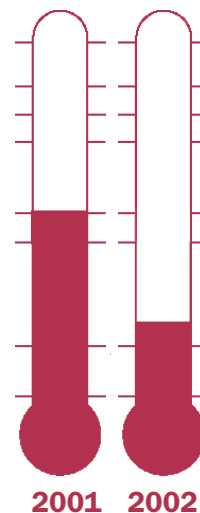
Deteriorating Food Safety Motivates S.T.O.P. Protest, Education Efforts

In the early days of the Bush presidency, **S.T.O.P.** asked "Will the Bush administration be friend or foe to food safety?" Alarming, recent actions of Bush-appointed officials and the agencies they head seem to point directly to "Foe."

Consider these events of recent weeks:

- After a judicial decision eliminates closure of plants repeatedly producing *Salmonella*-tainted meat, the USDA's lackluster response contains no replacement mechanisms to deal with the problems of chronic contamination. In fact, Undersecretary for Food Safety Elsa Murano is heard praising industry's "innovative" suggestion that testing for *E. coli* O157:H7 should be voluntary rather than mandatory.
- Even as the U.S. General Accounting Office releases a study demonstrating the ineffectiveness and danger of the USDA "HIMP" model inspection program in controlling contaminants like *E. coli* O157:H7, the USDA announces intention to expand its use of HIMP in meat plants as a replacement for contamination detection programs that have proven more effective.
- The USDA announces its intention to delay release of *listeria* reduction policies conceived under the Clinton administration until next December, thereby allowing 2500 people to suffer and 500 people to die from listeriosis while waiting for the policies aimed at cutting those statistics by half to be released.

Meat safety standards are less enforceable now than they were last year.



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IN MEMORIUM



S.T.O.P. **SAFE TABLES OUR PRIORITY**

dedicates this newsletter to the memory of Brianna Kriefall, Age 3, 1997-2000.

Brianna's mother, Connie Kriefall, writes "I felt this poem best describes a lot of what I feel."

*Go ahead and mention my child,
The one that died, you know.
Don't worry about hurting me further.
The depth of my pain doesn't show.
Don't worry about making me cry.
I'm already crying inside.
Help me to heal by releasing
The tears that I try to hide.
I'm hurt when you just keep silent,
Pretending he didn't exist.
I'd rather you mention my child,
Knowing that he has been missed.
You asked me how I was doing.
I say "pretty good" or "fine."
But healing is something ongoing.
I feel it will take a lifetime.*

– "Remembering", by Elizabeth Dent

A Note From the Executive Director

The disconnect is incredible.

On the one side, you've got victims like the Kriefalls and the Scoopos, whose stories appear in this issue, and dozens of others, calling **S.T.O.P.** with heartwrenching stories of what their families have suffered, continue to suffer, and have lost due to foodborne disease.

On the other hand, you've got decisions like the recent one to expand the mediocre HIMP meat inspection experiment, judged a failure by the GAO when it generated even higher levels of contamination than the prior system. Such decisions have no connection to the tragic realities they produce and the resultant needless risk with which American families are forced to live every day.

Perhaps it would be different if **S.T.O.P.'s** victim hotline rang directly into the USDA or the White House.

That's why **S.T.O.P.** exists. **S.T.O.P.'s** past successes have happened precisely through bringing victims' voices to these places. It's not about the glorification of our members, partisan politics, or anger for anger's sake. It's about an overriding desire on the part of hurting families to, in their own words, "Make sure that what happened to our family doesn't happen to anyone else's".

Nowadays the clamor of industry voices we need to cut through is louder than ever, and the silence of government protectors is deafening. Whoever you are, victim, family member, or concerned individual, wherever you live, your voice is needed to cut through the fog of ignorance, greed, and apathy, to sound the trumpet for safe food.

You may not know how to get started (or restarted). But the tips in this issue may help. Still not sure how your talents fit into the picture? Call 1-800-350-STOP and we'll discover your role together.

S.T.O.P. has helped government put the pieces together in the past to start moving in the right direction and secure safer food for our families. Working together, we can once again bridge the disconnect. We must STOP pain and suffering from foodborne disease.

– Karen Taylor Mitchell

S.T.O.P. SAFE TABLES OUR PRIORITY

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Victim Hotline: 1-800-350-STOP

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Staff: Karen Taylor Mitchell, *Executive Director*, Marcia Mason, *Administrative Assistant*

ACTIVIST PROFILE: GINA AND RON SCOPO, NORTH HAVEN, CT

Can you describe what has brought you to S.T.O.P.?

From November 8 to December 30, 2000, our 5-year-old son, Mikey, was hospitalized for 53 days due to *E. coli* poisoning. What we thought was to be possibly a 9 to 12 day stay, turned into a nightmare for our family. Mikey survived, but he still needs extensive rehabilitation due to all the setbacks he has endured while fighting for his life.

Tell us about your experience with *E. coli* O157:H7.

On November 8, 2000 when his diarrhea had blood in it, we took him to his pediatrician. She sent us to the emergency room immediately, and tests showed an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection. The doctors told us that he needed to be rehydrated and should be fine after a few days in the hospital. Instead, his condition started to deteriorate rapidly. He began hallucinating and his kidneys started to fail. An emergency operation was performed to begin peritoneal dialysis (to excrete waste products, which his kidneys could no longer do for him). During this time, Mikey was talking very little and crying in pain almost constantly. The doctors would not give him anything for pain because they did not want to mask any other possible complications.

Our family was at the hospital around the clock. We monitored him very closely because we realized the doctors did not seem to have an adequate grip of our son's life-threatening situation. Into the second week of his hospitalization, an EEG was performed which revealed his brain waves were not normal. Although his first MRI was normal upon his admission to the hospital, another MRI showed his brain to have abnormal areas in the frontal and occipital lobes, and the brain stem. Mikey could no longer speak or move. The areas beneath his lungs were filled with fluid that had to be drained.

Approximately 3 weeks into his hospital stay, Mikey had more emergency surgery. A few days passed and we noticed signs of severe pain. After we insisted on follow-up examinations, an overnight EEG study indicated that Mikey was, in fact, having seizures. Finally another MRI was ordered. The results were now conclusive; Mikey had two strokes. Emotional annihilation does not adequately describe what we, as a family, were feeling after hearing this news.

How is Mikey now?

Mikey has suffered extensive brain damage, particularly to the right brain, but we are still hopeful that he will make a full recovery. Doctors anticipate that this will take several years. It was a breakthrough last year when he started to say a few words and walk with the aid of a walker. He is taking seizure and high blood pressure medications and this past semester he began to attend school again, in regular classes. He gets frustrated because he remembers how he was before. But all things considered, he is doing very well. He is going for Botox injections and this will hopefully help his muscles.

How has this changed your lives?

This was a terrible ordeal for anyone to go through, and it's been a huge burden financially and emotionally. Gina has left her job to care for Mikey, and insurance has only covered about 80%. Our community has been wonderful and held fundraisers for us, but we've also faced negative

response from some state officials that makes you wonder whether the government cares at all about the quality of everything we eat and drink.

It's certainly opened our eyes to the dangers out there and the need to spread the word about *E. coli*. When Mikey was sick, we learned that the hospital had several cases of *E. coli* infection, although none were as severe as Mikey's. The likelihood that this happened to Mikey because of something he ate made us angry, because people should be told that these kinds of risks are out there. We started publishing brochures telling Mikey's story to alert people to the dangers that they probably weren't aware of. Since then we've worked with reporters to get articles in the paper, and last fall we testified at a press conference with another S.T.O.P. *E. coli* parent. By telling our story we hope to avert this terrible situation from happening to any other child or person.

 To read more about Mikey in the Scoopos' own words, go to <http://www.stop-usa.org/victims>





S.T.O.P. Reproducible Food Safety Fact Sheet ►►► **Copy And Pass It On!**

Reducing Your Risk of Foodborne Disease

S.T.O.P. is often asked how families can reduce their risks of foodborne disease. We believe strongly that the burden of improving food safety belongs squarely on the shoulders of industry and government. Therefore, some of the most important things you can do are to be aware of food safety issues, to be a member of a food safety organization, and to demand that government and industry improve food safeguards. In addition, S.T.O.P. recommends the following tips when buying, storing and serving food:

Shopping

1. Take time to inspect your supermarket. Ask what precautions they are taking to ensure food safety.
2. Check expiration, “sell by” or “use by” dates of animal products. If the product feels slimy, has a foul odor, or appears discolored, don’t buy it.
3. Select fruits and vegetables that are free of mold and decay (avoid brown spots, soft areas, and discoloration).
4. Wrap fruits and vegetables in plastic; do not place uncovered raw items directly on check-out conveyor belt.
5. Make sure eggs are free of cracks.
6. Select canned foods free of dents and cracks (bulging lids may indicate a food poisoning threat).
7. Make sure that different meat products are not touching one another in their “fresh” case, and that cooked and raw products are displayed separately.
8. Avoid cross-contamination between different foods in your shopping cart; don’t allow raw meat, poultry, or seafood juice to drip onto other groceries. Ask the store to wrap these items in plastic before placing them in your cart.
9. Use a plastic bag as a “glove” to pick up leaky meat packages and then turn it inside out to double-wrap your purchase.
10. Buy perishables last, keep them in the coolest part of your car or in a cooler, and drive directly home and refrigerate them immediately.

Storing and Serving

1. Wash lids of food cans and necks of water cooler bottles before opening them.
2. Do not reuse dishes and utensils during food preparation unless you have washed them thoroughly or sterilized them. For instance, don’t place cooked hamburgers on a plate that held raw ones, don’t use the same tongs on raw meat as those that are used on cooked meat.
3. Don’t put ready-to-eat food on a surface that previously held raw meat or poultry.
4. If the contents of canned food forcefully spray when the can is opened, or looks frothy or bubbly, return the can to the store or throw it away.
5. Do not leave perishables out of the refrigerator or freezer. Immediately date and refrigerate leftovers.
6. Keep your refrigerator at 40 degrees F or below and your freezer at 0 degrees F or below. (Use a thermometer to check the temperature).
7. Freeze meat and poultry if not using it within 2-3 days; freeze seafood if not using it within 1 day.
8. PLEASE NOTE freezing does not kill bacteria or viruses, it merely slows their growth.
9. Within 2 hours of removing from heat source, store leftovers in shallow dishes that cool quickly, in the refrigerator or freezer, so that bacteria will not have time to grow in the warm middle of the dishes.
10. Overwrap packages of raw meat, poultry or fish, or place them on a dish before refrigerating so that their juices won’t drip and cross-contaminate other foods.

There are also steps you can take when cooking and handling food to minimize your risks from foodborne disease. For more helpful information, see S.T.O.P.’s website at www.safeeating.org.

GIANTS



The indefatigable Senator **Tom Harkin** (D-IA), who has introduced for the third time a bill to close the legislative gap exposed by the Supreme Beef case; writer **Eric Schlosser**, who has used his newfound celebrity as the bestselling author of *Fast Food Nation* as a platform to awaken thousands of Americans to food safety concerns; and Pennsylvania parents **Rick and Trish Jacobs**, whose daughter Erin's grueling recovery from HUS has been accompanied by tireless advocacy for a much-needed mandatory *E. coli* O157:H7 reporting law in their state.

Bestselling Author Urges Continued S.T.O.P. Vigilance

Bestselling author Eric Schlosser inspired **S.T.O.P.** members and listeners to keep demanding safer food at a January 15th reception outside of Chicago that raised money for **S.T.O.P.** Schlosser's book, *Fast Food Nation*, frames foodborne illness as the human tragedy at the heart of a larger struggle for corporate responsibility and social justice. In his speech, Schlosser described current challenges facing food safety, noting that although the CDC estimates that 76 million cases of foodborne illness occur annually in the U.S., a tiny fraction are reported to the CDC. The variance, he noted, exposes the continued misdiagnosis and under-reporting of foodborne disease, and helps to explain the gap in public understanding of the problem.

Videotapes of Schlosser's lecture (and a very few remaining autographed copies of Schlosser's book) are available by contacting **S.T.O.P.** We thank Eric Schlosser for donating his time to **S.T.O.P.** and Donna and David Rosenbaum, Food Safety Partners, and Nancy Donley for hosting the event. We also gratefully acknowledge Harper Collins, Houghton Mifflin, and the Chicago Friends of Alex chapter for their substantial contributions to the events' success.

GERMS



The **National Meat Association**, which perpetuated the Supreme Beef lawsuit beyond the point where Supreme Beef's dissolution made it otherwise moot, for the sole purpose of destroying the USDA's *salmonella* testing regime; and the **Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals**, which chose to insult victims, ignore the reality of who prepares food in the United States, and invalidate twenty-five years of progress in recognizing American cultural diversity when it invoked the outdated statement "American housewives and cooks normally are not ignorant or stupid and their methods of preparing and cooking of food do not ordinarily result in *salmonellosis*".

Grants Available for Childrens' Medical Expenses

The First Hand Foundation offers funding for the families of seriously ill children to cover a range of medical expenses not covered by insurance or state aid. Funding falls into three categories:

- clinical expenses (such as procedures and medicines)
- durable medical goods (such as wheelchairs or transportation),
- displacement or medical travel expenses.

Eligible families must demonstrate financial and current medical need through submission of a short application and support materials. The Foundation does not fund past expenditures or debt reduction.

Interested families should contact Sarah Snyder at the Foundation, 816-201-1569 or ssnyder@cerner.com. While the average grant is \$3,000, some grants are substantially higher. Last year 95% of eligible applicants were funded. Visit their website at (www.firsthandfoundation.org)



Deteriorating Food Safety Motivates S.T.O.P. Protest, Education Efforts

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The swing of the pendulum back to a climate favoring industry profits over public health is a chilling occurrence for **S.T.O.P.** veterans and newcomers alike. **S.T.O.P.'s** Laurie Girand, parent of an *E. coli* O157:H7 victim, says "It is unconscionable for any administration to come in and turn the reins of control for food safety over to industry. If there is one thing **S.T.O.P.** has learned in nine years of advocacy, it is that the food industries have yet to accept that they are responsible for a grave threat to public health."

S.T.O.P. advocates are reaching out to demand better policies and to stopgap the regulatory void. Some are getting up and telling their stories at press conferences, like Serena Gordon of Croton, NY, who admits, "I absolutely hate public speaking but it's something I feel is important because we all need to get the word out that our food isn't safe." Some are reaching out to the public, like Renet Austin of Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, who singlehandedly distributed **S.T.O.P.'s** Safe Holidays materials to every parent and staff member at her daughters' schools. "I thought it was extremely, extremely important to remind every mom and dad out there that vigilance is so critical," says Austin.

Others, like Jude Barry and Roni Rudolph Austin of California, are working to get the word out through the media. "Having gone through hell myself," Rudolph Austin says, "I'll do anything I can to make sure this doesn't happen to anyone else". She encourages victims to work with **S.T.O.P.** to participate in an upcoming trip to Washington DC to meet with legislators.

S.T.O.P. President Nancy Donley notes that while the September 11th attacks have resulted in increased government concerns over and funding for food security in a broad sense, very little of that support is actually aimed toward the ongoing epidemic of foodborne disease. Meanwhile, the vast sums being directed at budget items like animal health and border x-rays only obscure the erosion of existing protections.

"We must not allow stealth attacks by government and industry on food safety advances!" advises Donley. "It's an absolutely crucial time for **S.T.O.P.** to stand up and defend the progress we've worked so hard to achieve."

Laurie Girand agrees. "Americans and their children have no other choice but to count on their government to protect them," she states. "All we insist is that government should do that job and do it well." ■

NEIGHBOR NOTES PROGRAM



The following people helped to support **S.T.O.P.** and provided important information to their neighbors through our Neighborly Notes program between November, 2001 and February, 2002:

Renet & Scott Austin, Cindy Bennett, Thomas and Lorraine Brayton, Margaret Brill, Jill Brimeyer, Dan Capriotti, Laura Day, Richard Dimock, Sonya Fendorf, Jan and William Fox, Mae Ann Gilbert, Laurie Girand and Scott McGregor, Serena Gordon, Karen and Gray Harris, Shannon and Dave Horn, Noreen Kademian, Julie Marler, Margaret McCaffrey, Ann-Marie & James McDade, Donna Messerle, Roseanne Mulcahey, Linda Nicholson, Cheryl, Steven & Tyler Roberts, Bonnie Rock, Gerald Roth, Linda Schoonmaker, Linda Scoopo, Jan Sowerby, Erin Stadler, Wanda Stephens, Ralph Stettler, Ken & Natalie Streiff, Sarah Tikriti

Thank you to everyone who participated. To join the next group of Neighbors, call 1-800-350-STOP.

Four Ways to Give to S.T.O.P. When You're Short on Cash

- 1) Donate your unused vacation or sick leave time to **S.T.O.P.** and get a tax break. Last fall, new IRS regulations were issued which allow employees at participating companies to donate unused pay to charity and decrease their taxable income by the same amount. Essentially, the donation becomes a pretax contribution. Ask your employer whether your company offers this program.
- 2) Auction off your old stuff online and instruct the buyers to send the money to **S.T.O.P.** Two good auction sites are www.ebay.com for a variety of merchandise, and www.half.com for books, cds and other "standard" items.
- 3) Do your online shopping through www.igive.com and designate **S.T.O.P.** as your charity. We'll get a portion of the proceeds from each sale.
- 4) Put **S.T.O.P.** in your will and make safer food your legacy.



S.T.O.P. thanks the following people for their treasured support in 2001*

Founders' Circle (\$1000 & up)

Civil Justice Foundation
Dairy Council of Wisconsin, Inc
William Marler, Esq.
Michael & Susan Pole
Eldon & Regina Roth
Robert & Charlotte Sherwin
United Food & Commercial Workers

Leadership Circle (\$500 & up)

Laurie Girard & Scott McGregor
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Star Franchise Association

Heroes Circle (\$250 & up)

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Food Safety
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Doreen Zeller

**This list reflects donations received between 1/1/2001 and 12/31/2001.*

If you believe a name may have been omitted in error, please call S.T.O.P. at (802) 863-0555.

S.T.O.P. also gratefully acknowledges the 2001 help of Lou Caracciolo, David Soltaire, Esq., John Gravel, Esq., and Vermont Associates.

S.T.O.P. received donations though February 7th in honor or memory of the following:

In honor of

Oconomowoc School District
Erica Austin and family

Elizabeth Stephens
Margaret Mermin MD

In memory of

Eric Brill
Patricia A. McGannon

Scotty Hinkley
Constance Tindall

Tyler Horn
Timothy and Leslie Heimbaugh

Kevin Kowalczyk
Barbara and Michael Kowalczyk
Peter and Karen Taylor Mitchell

James McDade
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Larry D. and Rhonda L. Cohen

Jonathan Vassilowitch
Cynthia Vassilowitch

Alex Donley on what would have been his 15th birthday

Kathleen Connors
Julie and Joseph Donley

Linda Ginzel
Catherine King

Thomas and Peggy Kloempken
Elsie and John Lindgren

Johanna List

Kathy List
Stan and Joanie McKinney

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Janet Sheffer and Larry Coronelli

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What Can I Do to Make Food Safer?

Thanks for asking! There's a lot you can do. For starters:

1. Write your local newspaper editor about the importance of safe meat, poultry, and food. Or, contact a reporter to discuss a potential story.
2. Send us newspaper and magazine articles on foodborne illness outbreaks, scientific and medical reports about *E. coli*, *salmonella*, *hemolytic uremic syndrome*, etc. It is invaluable when you are our eyes and ears!
3. Call or write your local state and national elected officials and let them know that you expect them to act for the health of their constituents and support safe food standards.
4. Drop a note to Oprah, 20/20, Dateline NBC, and your local and national news shows to ask them to do a piece or a followup story on food safety.
5. Contact your PTA and local school system and let them know your concerns about food safety.
6. Get your company to sponsor a S.T.O.P. speaker.
7. Notify restaurant and retail store management of poor practices such as undercooked or improperly wrapped meat or poultry, spoiled foods, lukewarm meals, and unhygienic surroundings.
8. Reproduce the public education materials on page 4 and distribute them to your friends.
9. Table at public health fairs or farmer's markets and distribute information about food safety. S.T.O.P. can provide you with brochures and other materials.
10. Start a local S.T.O.P. chapter. We can help with materials, names and speakers.
11. Find out about your state's Safe Food Task Force or Committee and offer to serve as a consumer representative.
12. Get others to join S.T.O.P. Feel free to pass this newsletter and donation materials along to friends and coworkers.