



NEWS

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"We are fed up and angered by spin control, distorted statistics, political- and industry-biased science, and industry lobby groups putting their dressing on issues and setting them out as the divine truth."

– Kathi S. Allen, S.T.O.P. co-founder, 1994

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

Summer 2002



www.SafeTables.org

Heralded Drop in Foodborne Illness Is Overstated, Overhyped

Recent headlines announced a drop in food poisoning based on preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The report does, as the headlines promise, suggest that stepped-up measures to make the food supply safer have been effective. Such news is a credit to the **S.T.O.P.** advocates who have in such a short time achieved monumental reforms, such as meat and poultry HACCP and the regulation of fruit and vegetable juice, which list high among contributing factors singled out by the CDC authors.

However, popular media failed to note that some of the drops – and in particular, a downward trend in *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Shigella* - are statistically inconclusive. In regards to *E. coli* O157:H7 in particular, Dr. Robert Tauxe of the CDC cautions, “It has varied from year to year enough that we really find it difficult to see a trend. It did decline from 2000 to 2001, but ... it may go back up again next year.”

Continued on page 6

S.T.O.P. Goes to Washington! Details and more photos, page 4.



S.T.O.P. members Elizabeth Tikriti, Jordan Kenne, and Robin Dimock with Senators Richard Durbin and Hillary Clinton.



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

P.O. Box 4352, Burlington,
Vermont 05406

Phone: (802)863-0555

Fax: (802)863-3733

E-Mail: feedback@stop-usa.org

www.SafeTables.org

Victim Hotline: 1-800-350-STOP

Board of Directors: Nancy Donley,
President, Elaine Dodge, *Chair*,
Dan Capriotti, *Treasurer*,
Laura Day, *Secretary*, and
Julie Marler

Staff: Karen Taylor Mitchell,
Executive Director, Marcia Mason,
Administrative Assistant,
Megan Dann Fesinmeyer,
Research Assistant, Alla Katsnelson,
Research Assistant

Help S.T.O.P. continue its unique work!

The following will be very
helpful to **S.T.O.P.**:

- ▶ airline tickets/coupons
- ▶ lodging gift certificates
- ▶ a recent model IBM or Mac
computer and accessories
- ▶ volunteer web skills
- ▶ office supplies
- ▶ sponsorships and hosts for
events
- ▶ paid speaking opportunities
- ▶ cash donations.



From the Executive Director

“The Numbers Game”

You’d think it would be easy.

After all, who’s against safe food? No one. Surely food producers are doing whatever they can to prevent people becoming sick from their products... right?

Unfortunately, no – a reality which too many of **S.T.O.P.’s** victim-members have learned the hard way. Just as Enron allowed the financial profit of a few to destroy the wellbeing of many, there are those among our nation’s food producers and processors that are routinely cutting corners, sometimes out of ignorance, but just as often out of greed. When the product is food, that greed comes at the expense of our loved ones’ lives.

In short, food safety has become a numbers game – one with some pretty bloated numbers. The food and beverage industries gave more than \$44 million to Congressional candidates and political parties over the last decade, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. On top of that, they spend millions more lobbying on topics like who should set the standards for safety on their products and how much authority government should have to enforce those standards. Funds spent to influence decisions like these totaled another \$44 million in 2000 alone.

Fortunately, **S.T.O.P.** advocates’ voices speak louder than industry lobbyists’. Each victim, family member or supportive individual who turned out for our March 14th rally or who sounds the call for food safety in their home community is *literally* worth his or her weight in gold. To each **S.T.O.P.** member who’s taken action recently, **thank you**. Efforts like yours are the reason why we’ve been so effective despite the opposition’s bounteous war chest.

Still, \$44+\$44 million adds up to a lot of influence. That’s why, if you can make a gift, or you know someone at a foundation or business who can help, or even if you can hold a garage sale and give **S.T.O.P.** the proceeds, it’s important that you do. Every contribution to an organization like **S.T.O.P.** helps to tip the balance sheet away from corporate greed and towards the precious health of our families.

Will it be easy? No. But with each person’s help, we can make it clear that the power of corporate money over our families’ health is something that we just won’t swallow.

– Karen Taylor Mitchell

Work With S.T.O.P.

S.T.O.P. has current job openings in DC and Vermont.
For more information, see our webpage, www.SafeTables.org,
or call (802) 863-0555.

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

Eating Safely for Two! Pregnancy and Foodborne Illness

Women have highly increased susceptibility to foodborne illness during a pregnancy, and fetuses share the risk. Foodborne illness in pregnant women can cause serious harm or even death to an unborn baby, and complications include premature birth, meningitis, mental retardation, sepsis, stillbirth, and spontaneous miscarriage (abortion). Serious foodborne germ threats to pregnant women and their babies include *Listeria*, *Toxoplasma gondii*, *E. coli* O157:H7, and *Salmonella*.

Fortunately, although there is no “zero-risk” approach you can take to avoid foodborne illnesses, your medical risks can be greatly lessened by following certain guidelines when preparing and consuming food during your pregnancy.

Avoid Certain Foods and Handle Others with Extra Care

The foods on this list have caused outbreaks of diseases known to be dangerous to your pregnancy.

Avoid:

- Raw or unpasteurized milk or cheeses, or lightly cooked foods made from them. Soft cheeses, such as feta, Brie, Camembert, Roquefort, blue-veined, ricotta and Mexican-style cheese, are commonly unpasteurized and thus are best avoided unless thoroughly cooked.
- Raw fish or shellfish, including oysters, sushi, clams, mussels, and scallops. Ready-to-eat, refrigerated seafood products (smoked salmon/lox, jerky, etc.)
- Foods containing raw or lightly cooked eggs, including certain salad dressings, cookie and cake batters, sauces, unpasteurized eggnog and meringues.
- Pates. Raw meat or undercooked ground, chopped or shaped meats
- Raw or undercooked poultry
- Ready-made or prepackaged salads
- Raw sprouts of any kind
- Unpasteurized fruit or vegetable juices, including ciders
- Presliced cantaloupe
- Food from salad bars and smorgasbords.

Reheat Until Steaming, or Do Not Eat at All:

Leftovers, hot dogs, cold, ready to eat meats, including ham, bologna, and other lunchmeats (cold

cuts), fermented and dry sausage, and other deli style meat and poultry products.

Take Special Care When Cooking and Eating

- Wash hands often, for at least 15 seconds. Use hot, soapy water before and after handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and handling pets.
- Limit use of antacids. Ingestion of antacids increases the risk of foodborne illness because it reduces the stomach acids which normally control bacteria.
- Be particularly cautious about the food safety track records of dining establishments you frequent. Avoid places that appear unsanitary.
- Follow regular safe food handling tips especially carefully. For more specific information and steps you can take to minimize your risks from foodborne disease, see **S.T.O.P.’s** website at www.SafeEating.org.

Be On The Alert for Symptoms of Foodborne Illness During Pregnancy

Symptoms of foodborne illness may be less severe and more difficult to detect in pregnant women because they may be confused with normal symptoms of pregnancy, such as morning sickness, or even a mild flu. Symptoms of foodborne illness can appear right away or up to several weeks after eating a contaminated food. Because the consequences can be dire, if you have even fleeting symptoms resembling those listed, contact your doctor immediately and ask whether testing for *Listeriosis*, *Salmonellosis* or *Toxoplasmosis* would be advised.

Symptoms to Watch For

Fever
Muscle aches
Neck ache
Headache
Nausea or vomiting
Diarrhea
Abdominal cramps
Visual problems
Lymph node enlargement

For more information about *Listeriosis*, *Salmonellosis*, *Toxoplasmosis* and other foodborne diseases, see <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus> or call **S.T.O.P.** at 1-800-350-STOP.

Making Tracks In The Capitol And Across The Nation

S.T.O.P. members have been racking up the frequent flyer miles to DC over the past few months in order to portray the critical human health impacts of food policy decisions to a new generation of USDA and Congressional staffers, and their work has been making a visible difference.

S.T.O.P. Holds a Protest Rally, followed by Congressional Visits

S.T.O.P.'s rally on DC on March 14th was followed by several days of Congressional visits by rally attendees Mike Kowalcyk, Patricia and Laura Buck, Laura Day, Robin Dimock, Jordan and Heather Kenne, Sarah and Elizabeth Tikriti and Ellen Globokar. See photos and a copy of the comments of **S.T.O.P.** Board member Laura Day on pages 4-5 of this newsletter. The rally and six **S.T.O.P.** members were prominently featured on the PBS documentary *Frontline* in April.

S.T.O.P. Meets with Elsa Murano...Again

S.T.O.P. president Nancy Donley traveled to DC to meet with USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Elsa Murano and speak at the Consumer Federation of America conference on food policy. The same day, in clear response to the public health concerns amplified by **S.T.O.P.** and consumer groups, Murano announced a new directive holding meat grinders responsible for having effective decontamination strategies for *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157:H7.

S.T.O.P. Testifies Before Congress about School Lunch Safety

S.T.O.P. members Sue Doneth and Cheryl, Steve and Tyler Roberts, whose families are victims of *Hepatitis A* and *E. coli* O157:H7 transmitted through school lunches, testified at a Congressional hearing in support of safer food regulations. The joint Senate/House hearings were spurred in part by the CDC's report of a 56% increase in outbreaks linked to school lunches between 1990 and 1997. Read their testimony at **S.T.O.P.'s** website.

S.T.O.P. Condemns USDA's Egregious Mishandling of Its Own Regulation

S.T.O.P. joined the Government Accountability Project and Public Citizen at a press conference May 24th, 2002, for the release of a report titled *CONSUMERS' HAMBURGER HELL: Bad Plants Thrive While USDA Looks the Other Way*. This report details the inadequacies and abysmal implementation by USDA of its own pathogen-testing program. **S.T.O.P.** founder Donna Rosenbaum, and **S.T.O.P.** members Doug and Connie Kriefall, whose 3-year-old daughter Brianna died from *E. coli* O157:H7 poisoning, flew to DC to advocate for stronger and better governmental regulations and to demonstrate how USDA's poor performance destroys families."

Meanwhile, **S.T.O.P.** continues to support members making inroads against foodborne disease in local communities at the same time. Barbara Kowalcyk is kicking off the Kids' Campaign for Safer Food and a petition drive in her Wisconsin town. Serena Gordon of New York continues to help victims across the nation pour their stories out on paper to heal and to educate people about foodborne disease. Linda Deasley of Rhode Island set up a meeting with her local legislator's staff to discuss living 15 years with the aftermath of foodborne disease. Laureen Spitz of Wisconsin developed the enclosed fact sheet for pregnant women (and is looking for help in securing funding and distributing it).

Every member's selfless help brings us closer to our goals: that our Congress and regulatory officials will acknowledge the needless suffering of so many foodborne illness victims by quickly and definitively reversing our nation's collision course with foodborne disaster. In a country that claims to have the safest food supply in the world, no child or adult should suffer what **S.T.O.P.'s** victims have because of preventable foodborne disease.



Top: Mike Kowalcyk holds a photo of his son, Kevin, at the March protest.

Bottom: Protesters unite at DC Rally.

“We Will Not Rest”

Statements of S.T.O.P.'s Laura Day at DC Rally

When I became a victim of foodborne illness in 1993, food safety regulations had changed little since Upton Sinclair penned *The Jungle* at the turn of the last century. The look, sniff and poke method did not help processors identify the bacteria that hospitalized me for seven weeks and nearly took my life. We have made tremendous strides in food safety over the last decade, largely due to a few dedicated individuals and organizations like **S.T.O.P.** However, in recent months, we have witnessed a rapid erosion of standards and enforcement capabilities. The USDA now lacks the ability to close plants whose products repeatedly fail salmonella tests, and listeria reduction policies conceived under the Clinton administration are being delayed. *[The U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in December stated that USDA's Salmonella performance standard did not prove that a plant was insanitary and subject to a shutdown. Based on this decision, the USDA has acknowledged that although it can, it will not shut down plants in other districts for failure of Salmonella performance standards.]*

These alarming setbacks come at a time when most Americans have a heightened concern about safety on many levels. The potential threat of food and beverage contamination by a terrorist group pales when compared to the real threat of foodborne disease that already exists. Each year the US sees 76 million cases of foodborne disease and 5,000 deaths according to CDC estimates. We believe that these estimates are conservative.

The destruction caused by *E.coli*, *Salmonella*, *Listeria* and other contaminants is widespread and long-term. Foodborne disease has devastated communities, families and lives. I lost almost a year of my life to the illness and recovery. My parents struggled trying to decide where their 18-year-old daughter would want to be buried. When the ordeal was over, I had lost my spleen, my hair, a boyfriend, a normal immune system and a semester of college and had gained a quarter of a million dollars in medical bills and battle scars. The effects of these diseases go far beyond the physical. It has been more than eight years since my illness, and I still think about it every day. And I am still angry that it could have been prevented.

I was a *victim* of foodborne disease. I am a *survivor* of foodborne disease. We are all survivors here. We are also concerned citizens and active voters. Bruised and battered as we are, **S.T.O.P.** will not rest while precious safeguards are stripped away.

(Read more of Laura's D.C. speech at our website, www.SafeTables.org.)

USDA Watch: Good, Bad and Unimaginable

- ▶ The USDA recently announced two positive steps aimed at reducing foodborne illness. First, Under Secretary of Food Safety Elsa Murano announced a directive that would require ground beef processors to target *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157:H7 in their pathogen reduction (HACCP) plans either by requiring their suppliers to implement a validated antimicrobial step on beef or by employing one themselves. Second, USDA introduced a policy to share meat and poultry companies' product distribution lists with state and federal agencies during product recalls. **S.T.O.P.** has repeatedly argued the need for better information sharing to enable contaminated product to be more easily traced in order to allow faster and more thorough removal of contaminated product from store shelves.
- ▶ On the other hand, Murano has begun to publicly question the zero-tolerance policy for *Salmonella* in ground meat and poultry purchased for the school lunch program. She had the audacity to cite a **S.T.O.P.** member's Congressional testimony as a reason to question the standing policy. Cheryl Roberts, whose testimony Murano referenced, had this to say in reply: "I can't believe she would even consider rolling that back. I would hate to have her job and have it on my conscience that children are suffering and dying and that it's something they could have prevented." Current policy sets a zero-tolerance for both *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157:H7 for ground meat sold to the federal school lunch program. This means that samples taken from raw products must not produce a positive test result for these pathogens, or the product lot cannot be sold to the federal school lunch program. **S.T.O.P.** contends that zero tolerance is a good policy on which further reforms must be built.

PBS' Frontline features S.T.O.P. Members

If you caught PBS' Frontline show "Modern Meat" on 4/18/02, you saw a number of **S.T.O.P.** members on camera who weren't identified by name. Speakers on tape from **S.T.O.P.** included Laura Day, Mike Kowalczyk, Nancy Donley, and Suzanne Kiner, shown with her daughter Brienne. Also pictured at the rally with their **S.T.O.P.** buttons were Patricia and Laura Buck, Heather and Jordan Kinne, Sarah and Elizabeth Tikriti, Robin Dimock and Karen Taylor Mitchell.



Heralded Drop in Foodborne Illness Is Just a Drop in the Bucket

Continued from page 1

The authors of the report also warn that “Although the incidence of infection has declined for several foodborne diseases, the incidence of foodborne diseases remains high.” The authors identify increases in infections caused by *Salmonella Newport*, *Salmonella Heidelberg*, and *Salmonella Javiana* and the high incidence of foodborne diseases in children, especially infants, as causes for “major concern” – and note that the 83% increase in *Vibrio* creates a particular danger for the elderly.

Concurrent with the report’s release, Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman announced, “These data demonstrate that we are on the right track,” But **S.T.O.P.** notes that that assessment may not be quite accurate, either. “These statistics paint a snapshot of a recent past, not of the future with the subtle erosion of food safety protections that we have been seeing,” said Karen Taylor Mitchell, **S.T.O.P.’s** Executive Director. “There is reason to fear that even while our country pats ourselves on the back for its successes in fighting

foodborne disease, the very systems that achieved them may be disassembled and destroyed.”

S.T.O.P.’s President Nancy Donley concurs, and says she often reminds the doctors and policymakers she speaks with that statistics only go so far. “Every incidence of foodborne disease is a case in which someone’s life was harmed due to the simple act of eating food believed to be safe,” says Donley. “Statistics can never convey the grief and tragedy of the needless death of a child.”

The full CDC report can be accessed online at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5115a3.htm>.

Thanks!

For their help in producing a very successful and attention-grabbing March rally (see page 4), **S.T.O.P.** thanks our Safe Food Coalition partners: Consumer Federation of America, the United Food and Commercial Workers, and especially Center for Science in the Public Interest, plus **S.T.O.P.** student volunteer Kathlyn Asselin.

S.T.O.P Membership Form

YES! I want safer food! Here’s my 2002 membership donation. Send me my **S.T.O.P.** button! Please fill out the information below and return to **S.T.O.P.** at P.O. Box 4352, Burlington, Vermont 05406-4352.

Your tax-deductible contribution supports the work of **S.T.O.P.** – Safe Tables Our Priority.

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Please make your check payable to **S.T.O.P.**

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Work phone: _____ E-mail: _____

**OPEN LETTER FROM A S.T.O.P. MEMBER**

A Call To Action

Dear S.T.O.P. Members,

On August 11, 2001, our beautiful 2-year old son, Kevin, died of *Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome* (HUS) as a result of an *E.coli* O157:H7 infection. At this time, we still do not know the exact source of the *E.coli* but suspect it was contaminated food. Needless to say, our family is heart-broken and devastated.

As **S.T.O.P.** members, we do not need to tell you about the suffering that victims of food-borne illnesses and their families go through. Nor do we need to tell you that recently there have been several setbacks for food safety. On March 14, 2002, three members of our family participated in the rally in Washington, DC, and attended the press conference in which Senator Harkin introduced the Meat and Poultry Pathogen Reduction and Enforcement Act of 2002 (S. 2013/H.R. 3956). While this bill will not solve all of the problems with food safety, it is definitely a step in the right direction. At this point, it is extremely important that the government and industry hear from us, the consumers.

To facilitate this, our family is spearheading two campaigns. The first campaign is a petition drive which will show voter support for the bill. We encourage you to visit **S.T.O.P.'s** website or call **S.T.O.P.** to obtain a copy of the petition and then ask family, friends, neighbors and co-workers to sign. Along with the petition is a handout that provides a good opportunity for increasing awareness of food-borne illnesses and educating members of your community. Our family is organizing volunteers to go door-to-door in our community as well as having booths at local festivals and concerts this summer.

The second campaign is a letter-writing campaign for both adults and children to explain how a food-borne illness has impacted their lives. Adults will write their legislative representative and the children will write or draw pictures for the First Lady, Laura Bush. **S.T.O.P.** has developed a handout with ideas for what issues to address in the letters which is also available at **www.SafeTables.org**. We encourage you to write letters yourselves and ask friends and family in your community to also write letters. In addition, our family is asking Kevin's playmates to write letters or draw pictures.

We are collecting these letters and petitions to present them in Washington, DC in August to commemorate the first anniversary of Kevin's death. As Kevin's parents, we are asking for your help in making these campaigns a successful national effort for safer food. To join in or if you have any further questions, please e-mail us at KidsCampaign@stop-usa.org or call Karen at **S.T.O.P.**, 1-800-350-STOP.

Thank You,
Barb & Mike Kowalczyk, Mount Horeb, WI

S.T.O.P.'s mission is to prevent suffering illness and death from food contaminated by pathogens. We do this by: providing information and education, advocating sound public policy, watch-dogging industry practices, and supporting victims.

Give online! www.SafeTables.org



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***S.T.O.P. has joined the
Combined Federal
Campaign. Designation
#9828. Tell your friends!***

DEDICATION

S.T.O.P. dedicates this newsletter to
Tyler David Horn,
June 3, 1997 – July 18, 2000

*Tyler's father David Horn shared this with friends
and family at his son's funeral.*

The Morning After

"I waited and waited to see that light brown fluffy hair, big blue eyes and the bright morning smile come into our bedroom to wake us up as he did every day. He always started the day off with a smile and burst of energy that allowed us to make it through the day. And when I came home from work he was there at the door sometimes in a costume and sometimes just in a diaper, and once again no matter how tired I was he lifted my spirits and just wanted to be with me no matter what. I can still hear him singing "sing... sing a song, sing out loud, sing of good times not bad, sing of happy not sad!" His songs will echo in our heads forever. His ability for music and dance were amazing, he sang constantly and made our whole family dance and sing together.

"To get his day started on time, he learned to climb

out of his crib rather quickly, even higher rails couldn't stop him, for he had so much to get done and so little time to do it. He never wanted to miss anything in life by sleeping. I'll never forget the time when he learned how to climb in and out of the play pen, and he climbed back in to look for something one day, I asked him "what are you looking for," he said "looking for," I said "no what is it you are looking for Tyler," he answered again "looking for." I think now Tyler has found what he is looking for in the Kingdom of God.

"He had so much to offer to everyone. To his grandmas he was a gardener, musician and beach companion, to his grandpas he was a golfer, fisherman, race fan, and construction worker, to his cousins a playmate, and to us his parents and sister he was a dream come true. He was the sparkle in our hearts that will remain with us forever.

"I ask you to keep Tyler's energy and spirit going, for he has touched us all and has made us better people; he has set an example for the way to live life. He was

intrigued by everything and everyone, he took time to notice flowers, butterflies, the blue sky, the moon and the stars; nothing got by his senses. And now we know why."

