



# The CASA Reporter

## Central Atlantic States Association of Food and Drug Officials

▼ **President's Message**

by Sue Yeager



**A**s I sit here at my computer reflecting upon the eight inches of snow that has fallen overnight, I picture all of the folks from the kids on up who are shoveling, snow-blowing, and plowing to get through the snow to their destinations. In a way, that is like what all of us are

doing on a daily basis, “shoveling and plowing through” an increasing amount of work that has to be done, with often fewer people to do it. All of the members of CASA are “plowing through” their inspections, training programs, and other various duties, trying to keep ahead of what will be coming next.

In CASA we all have the same goal: to protect the public safety related to foods, drugs, and medical devices. We all work very hard to be successful at this. I know our members are dedicated to this goal and I am proud of this, as you all should be.

As President of CASA this year, I realize more and more the difficulties faced by our members in participating in training programs due to “tight budgets.” I hear this from all of the local Conferences. Our Executive Board has just completed our December meeting and this message was stated many times. This is a difficult challenge we must be willing to meet.

CASA has to look to the future to maintain its viability and to continue to produce the quality of training that has occurred in the past. It is getting harder and more expensive to bring in speakers for the annual conferences. CASA's membership slips a little more each year. Some of the folks who have been the foundation of many local conferences for years are now close to, or at, retirement age. CASA appears to be at or near a crossroad and we need all of our members to be willing to “step up to the plate” to fill the void to maintain the great organization that has been built

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▼ **CASA Annual Conference Hits Gettysburg in May**

**T**he Eisenhower Inn and Conference Center in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania is the location for next May's Annual CASA Conference. The conference will take place close to the battlefield area, which is steeped in civil war history. Conference participants can look forward to learning about the epic battle not to mention all the various public health seminars offered at the conference.

The conference, which runs from May 16<sup>th</sup> to May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006, will feature topics on many varied subjects including:

- Foodborne Illness CSI: Cracking the Legal Code
- School Food Safety With A HACCP Approach
- Flu Pandemic Treat
- The Posting of Restaurant Inspections On the Internet
- The Development of Emergency Preparedness Training for Retail Food Stores
- Updating the Definition for Temperature Control for Potentially Hazardous Foods
- Retail Food Allergens
- Amusement Park Ride Inspection Techniques
- Updating the Food Code To Address Norovirus
- An Industry Approach To Food Safety In Mfg.
- Updates from the FDA, AFDO and ISSC ( Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference)

The conference will also feature exhibitors with up-to-date information on their products and organizations.

The Conference center is well equipped to handle the upcoming conference, offering all the amenities that would be expected by today's business traveler. The Annual Conference promises to have it all; perspectives from the past, present and future. Additional information will be posted on the organization's website at [www.casafdo.org](http://www.casafdo.org)

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## ▼ Japanese Markets Open to U.S. Beef

**I**n an agreement between the two countries, American beef producers will once again be able to sell beef products to Japanese markets after a two year prohibition. Japan prevented the importation of American beef after BSE or mad cow disease was discovered in an animal from Washington State.

The agreement, announced by United States Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, is seen as “an important step toward normalized trade based on scientifically sound, internationally recognized standards.” Beef producers have also hailed the agreement but described it as a first step. They are concerned that the new rules will result in limited sales to Japan. United States officials estimate that only about 35% of U.S. cattle would meet the new standards of the agreement, a far cry from the \$1.4 billion in beef sales realized the year before trade with Japan was halted.

The new rules require documentation that animals for importation to Japan be 20 months old or younger at slaughter. The requirement is based on scientific evidence that mad cow disease takes longer than 20 months to manifest. Additionally, records must be available that identifies the origin of the animals to aid in proper traceback.

The economic implications of BSE on the beef industry cannot be understated. The disease extensively decimated cattle herds in the United Kingdom. After BSE was discovered in the Washington state cow in 2003, almost all of the 119 countries that were purchasing beef products from the U.S. stopped doing so. Agriculture Secretary Johann said that 67 countries now accept American beef for importation. The United States beef industry will again be competing with Australian producers that filled the gap in the Japanese market.

## ▼ Cold Plasma Destroys Bacteria

**S**everal researchers working in this country have developed a technique that could be used to destroy disease causing bacteria in food and on food manufacturing equipment. The technique uses cold plasma devices and could be used for a wide range of applications, including the sterilization of medical or food service equipment, food, and possibly even the decontamination of biological weapons.

Plasmas contain charged electrons and ions and uncharged particles like chemically reactive atoms and molecules. At atmospheric temperatures, most plasmas are very hot and difficult to control. They are in short, the make-up of the stars. Other examples of plasmas include bolts of lightning and welding equipment.

Cold plasmas, on the other hand, work at room temperature and pressure by accelerating electrons in an electric or electromagnetic field and colliding them with gas atoms and molecules. Specifically, helium gas is excited by the electrical field. This creates ions and free radicals that can damage the structure of organic and inorganic materials. If bacteria are exposed to plasma of this kind, it is killed by altering the surface of the organism. Researchers believe this technology can also be effective against viruses.

The use of cold plasma for disinfecting materials could be the answer for the food service industry as well as many other businesses. Some other uses that cold plasma disinfection can be used for include the rapid decontamination of clothing, equipment and personal protection gear in the case of

## President's Message

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over the years by many people.

I just want you all to know that the members of the Executive Board are working very hard to meet whatever challenges arise this year, and will look forward to working with the local conferences to be successful in these endeavors. We can't do it without you!

I wish all of “CASA land” a wonderful holiday season and I look forward to serving you and CASA until the end of my term at the Annual Conference in Gettysburg in 2006.

## Gettysburg Conference

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very shortly. CASA members will receive e-mail notification when conference registration materials and fees are set.

Set aside the dates of May 16-19, 2006 for the 91<sup>st</sup> Annual CASA Conference in Gettysburg. Your local Susquehanna Conference colleagues have planned an informative and enjoyable conference. Don't miss this training opportunity.

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## ▼ Debate Over Acrylamide in Foods Continues

**A** new chapter in the debate over what risk the chemical acrylamide, a known carcinogen in rodents, poses to humans is being written in California. The state attorney general and environmental groups are warning consumers about the presence of the chemical in French fries and potato chips.

Food scientists have found acrylamide in many foods such as coffee, breads, olives, breakfast cereals and many others, and believe that humans have been consuming it for years with little or no ill affects. Acrylamide, whose presence in foods was discovered in 2002, is a byproduct of cooking foods, particularly those that are fried or baked at high temperatures. It shows up everywhere in our diets and is present in 40% of our daily caloric intake. The highest concentration of the chemical shows up in French fries and potato chips and given the fact that Americans consume so much of these products they are seen as a concern.

From an epidemiological standpoint exposure to a toxic chemical and the amount of acceptable risk are key questions. So what concentration levels of acrylamide are harmful to humans

and how much risk is acceptable? Scientists do not always agree and given the lack of this information many believe that California's course is ill advised.

The California attorney general filed suit in August against McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, KFC and several potato chip manufacturers claiming that the companies must warn the public that their foods contain a toxic chemical as required by the state's Proposition 65. Assistant attorney general, Edward G. Weil says the state took the action because the FDA declined to act.

The scientific community is not so sure that enough evidence exists to require such a warning. "Scientists don't know that the chemical is hazardous in doses people get through their diet," say Lois Swirsky Gold, director of the Carcinogenic Potency Project at UC Berkeley and that, "...dose is the key." The Environmental Protection Agency has fixed a maximum level in drinking water of 0.5 parts per billion (ppb). For the purpose of comparison a small order of McDonald's fries contains 401 ppb and a small bag of potato chips about 466 ppb.

There is a possibility that reductions of acrylamide in foods can be achieved. Levels of the chemical vary between different brands and even brands within the same company. Several variables contribute to acrylamide levels including the type of oils used in cooking, the potatoes used, storage time and length of cooking time. Research into these variables continues.

## Cold Plasma

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a terrorist attack. It means a rapid and inexpensive way to destroy even the hardiest bacteria and spores. Its' potential for use in hospitals and in the field is great. It is no wonder that cold plasma research is being underwritten by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research.

## ▼ Causes of Food Illness

**T**he Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) announced in November that fruits and vegetables cause more foodborne illness than raw meat, chicken or raw shell eggs.

"Although poultry has historically been responsible for far more Salmonella infections, in the most recent years...produce seems to be catching up," the statement said. The group is calling for tougher federal standards regarding fruits and vegetables.

The possible mechanism in the contamination of these produce products seems to be manure that is used to fertilize the plants. The practice of using manure is common in Latin America, which is a growing source for fresh produce in the United States. The manure can contain harmful pathogenic bacteria like Salmonella and Escherichia coli that can then contaminate the produce.

Between 2002 and 2003 produce products were identified as the food vehicle in 31 outbreaks as compared with only 29 from chicken and/or other poultry products. Looking at numbers of illness cases, fruits and vegetables made 28,315 people sick from 1990 to 2003, accounting for approximately 20% of all cases. In the same time period chicken made 14,729 people sick and eggs were responsible for 10,847 illnesses.

Why the larger numbers for produce products? The CSPI report claims and pathogens can adhere to the rough surfaces of fruits and vegetables that may be difficult to wash off. Additionally, many types of produce,

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## Causes of Food Illness

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such as tomatoes and sprouts, may not undergo cooking at high enough temperatures to kill the bacteria causing the contamination. Despite these facts, the report still urges consumers to eat plenty of produce.

The largest cause of foodborne outbreaks, although not numbers of illness cases, for the years of 1990 to 2003 was seafood.

**See you  
in  
Gettysburg!  
May 16-19**

## ▼ FDA Cracks Down on Fraudulent Avian Flu Treatment

**W**ith the growing threat of a bird flu outbreak products are showing up on the market that claim to be effective preventative treatments. However, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are warning consumers to be wary of possible fraudulent claims. Toward that end, the FDA has sent warning letters to nine companies marketing bogus bird flu products.

The products tout unproven claims such as, “prevents avian flu,” “a natural virus shield,” “kills the virus,” and “treats the avian flu.” Eight of the products were marketed as dietary supplements, but the warning letters put the companies on notice that the FDA considers them drugs based upon the claims to prevent or treat disease. As such, the FDA will treat the products as new drugs requiring agency approval before they can be

marketed. The companies must respond to the FDA regarding their future actions.

Acting FDA Commissioner, Andrew von Eschenbach, MD stated that, “The use of unproven claims and treatments increases the risk of catching and spreading the flu rather than lessening it because people assume they are protected and safe and they aren’t. I consider it a public health hazard when people are lured into bogus treatments based on deceptive or fraudulent medical claims.”

As to the possible efficacy and safety of the products, the FDA states that they are not aware of any scientific evidence that points to them treating or preventing avian flu. Furthermore, the agency states that the products could cause possible harm or interfere with conventional treatments for the flu.