

— NEW REPORT · AUGUST 2026

Trump slashed
federal food safety
enforcement. Now
Americans are *getting sick*
from the food supply.

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The federal system built to catch contaminated food *before it reaches a kitchen* has been taken apart.

As families spent this summer wondering what was safe to put on the dinner table, everyone is wondering what happened to the safeguards designed to protect our food supply. The truth is, the Trump administration has spent the past year and a half taking apart the federal system built to catch contaminated food before it reaches a kitchen. The administration fired thousands of food safety staff at the FDA, USDA, and CDC, stopped requiring surveillance of six foodborne pathogens – including the parasite behind this summer’s record outbreak – pushed the food traceability rule back to 2028, and let foreign facility inspections fall to their lowest level since 2011. Career FDA staff warned in January that the cuts would produce exactly this outcome. Seven months later, cyclospora infections are running more than thirteen times last year’s level and 40 percent of adults say they are buying or eating less produce. Even though Trump and his allies promised to ‘Make America Healthy Again’, his administration has made it harder to find out what is making Americans sick.

— BY THE NUMBERS

A record outbreak in a *gutted* safety system.

15,716

CDC-confirmed cases of U.S.-acquired cyclosporiasis this summer – up from 1,180 over nearly the same stretch of 2025. Plus 828 hospitalizations and two deaths.

[CDC · Cyclosporiasis Surveillance](#)

7 yrs

Time since the FDA last inspected Taylor Farms de Mexico, the facility at the center of the lettuce outbreak.

[CBS News](#)

17 of 28

Foodborne illness outbreaks announced by U.S. regulators in 2025 for which no recall was ever announced. 13 investigations never identified the food involved.

[PIRG · Food for Thought 2026](#)

–20%

Fall in prepackaged lettuce sales in July 2026 as families changed how they eat. Foodborne illness costs Americans an estimated \$75 billion a year.

[CBS News · PIRG](#)

–29%

Drop in FDA foreign food safety inspections in 2025 – the lowest total outside pandemic years since 2011.

[CBS News](#)

8 → 2

Foodborne pathogens CDC still requires reporting on. Cyclospora, Listeria, Campylobacter, Shigella, Vibrio, and Yersinia became optional last year.

[NBC News](#)

3,859 · 2,499 · 19,984

Employees lost at the FDA, CDC, and USDA respectively in FY 2025 under Trump – including 874 at the Food Safety and Inspection Service. Meanwhile, states – which conduct more than 90% of the nation's produce inspections – were told to expect cuts of up to 60% to their food safety cooperative agreements.

[Food Safety Magazine · Agri-Pulse](#)

KEY FINDINGS · 01

Trump fired thousands of food safety workers – and *delayed* the one rule built to trace contaminated food.

Trump fired thousands of food safety workers last year.

Tens of thousands of people worked at the FDA and USDA before Trump began waves of firings, buyouts, and forced retirements. In total, the FDA lost 3,859 employees in fiscal 2025, and the USDA lost 19,984, including 874 at the Food Safety and Inspection Service. The administration has insisted inspectors were spared, with an HHS spokesperson recently declaring, “FDA inspectors were not impacted.” Yet layoffs gutted the support staff who booked inspector travel and translators, and foreign inspections collapsed.

“*Career FDA staff warned in January that the cuts would produce exactly this outcome. Seven months later, cyclospora infections are running more than thirteen times last year's level.*”

– DEFEND AMERICA ACTION

Trump delayed the one rule built to trace contaminated food back to its source.

The FDA’s Food Traceability Rule requires farm-to-store records for high-risk foods, among them leafy greens, peppers, and shell eggs – the exact categories at the center of this summer’s outbreaks. Compliance was set to go into effect January 20, 2026, but FDA pushed it to July 20, 2028. A Salmonella outbreak tied to Midwest Poultry Services eggs that began in November 2025 produced no recall until July 22, 2026. More than a month after the jalapeño recall that same day, FDA has still not publicly named the grower behind 431 illnesses in 32 states.

KEY FINDINGS · 02

Trump's FDA dropped the ball on *foreign food inspections*.

FDA inspections are the first line of defense for mitigating contamination outbreaks. About a third of FDA foreign inspections over the past decade found violations, including human feces in Mexican growing fields. Federal law requires nearly 20 times the foreign inspections FDA managed last year under Trump.

› *Every major outbreak this summer traced back to imported food.*

Lettuce and jalapeños came from Mexico, the E. coli blueberries from Chile. Some 47,000 foreign manufacturers ship 90 percent of non-meat food into the U.S., and FDA has inspected 4.5 percent of them since 2023.

› *The farm at the center of the cyclospora outbreak had not seen a federal inspector since 2019.*

FDA last inspected Taylor Farms de Mexico seven years ago. The visit before that came in 2013, after a different cyclosporiasis outbreak.

KEY FINDINGS · 03

The Trump administration stopped mandatory tracking of Cyclospora *before* this summer's largest outbreak on record.

On July 1, 2025, Trump's CDC quietly narrowed FoodNet, the 30-year-old federal-state network covering 54 million Americans, down to Salmonella and Shiga toxin-producing E. coli. Reporting on Cyclospora and five other pathogens became optional, with internal CDC talking points pointing to reduced funding as the reason. Twelve months later, cyclosporiasis cases hit more than thirteen times the prior year's level, with 828 hospitalizations and two deaths. HHS Secretary RFK Jr. initially dismissed the criticism as invalid, saying "We've had no cuts in our surveillance program" before conceding the FoodNet reductions.

KEY FINDINGS · 04

Trump's FDA implemented plans to *reduce federal domestic food inspections* ahead of the outbreak.

In April 2025, Trump's FDA also drew up plans to end most of its own routine food inspections and hand the work to states, while cutting the grants those states rely on. The plan became policy. FDA launched the BRIDGE Project in June 2025, began live testing with selected states that October, and in February 2026 made "leveraging state capacity" for routine inspections an official agency priority, freeing itself to focus elsewhere. FDA had been pulling back from routine domestic inspection for a full year before this summer's outbreak began.

› *The Trump FDA shuttered food testing labs and suspended lab quality control last year.*

In April 2025, Trump's FDA shuttered two of its seven food testing labs in San Francisco and Chicago, delaying seafood and produce testing before reopening them weeks later. The administration then suspended quality control for the remaining labs.

KEY FINDINGS · 05

Americans are changing how they eat — and *absorbing the cost*.

New polling from late July found that 40 percent of American adults are buying or eating less produce, with only 13 percent expressing a lot of confidence in FDA. A separate poll found that a majority of American voters now say they have little or no confidence in government oversight of food safety. Last year's Gallup polling recorded the lowest percentage of Americans expressing confidence in the federal government's regulation and assurance of food safety since it began tracking in 1999.

“*The lowest percentage of Americans expressing confidence in the federal government's regulation and assurance of food safety since Gallup began tracking in 1999.*”

— GALLUP · 2025 CONSUMER SURVEY

DEFEND AMERICA ACTION

DEFEND AMERICA ACTION • AUGUST 2026

*Americans deserve to know their
food is safe. It's time to fight back.*

Defend America Action is a 501(c)(4) organization dedicated to defending working families from the destructive policies of the Trump administration and Congressional Republicans.

Every figure and citation in this new report links to its source – from the CDC, FDA, and Gallup to CBS News, NBC News, ProPublica, the Guardian, Food Safety News, and PIRG's Food for Thought 2026.

DefendAmericaAction.org

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