

**COMMENTS FROM FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES ON THE USDA  
MICROBIOLOGICAL DATA PROGRAM**

Thank you for allowing me to make some brief remarks today. Florida is enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate as a partner in the Microbiological Data Program (MDP) and we appreciate the leadership, guidance, and support of USDA in this area.

Similar to the USDA's Pesticide Data Program (PDP), the MDP's goal is to provide monitoring data indicating the presence or absence of potential problems in the nation's food supply. In this case, the effort is focused on selected food borne pathogens and indicator organisms in fresh produce. Critical to achieving this goal is standardized sample collection, microbiological analyses, and data reporting among the participating states.

We feel the states which are participating can provide the necessary ability to perform the desired analyses and collect representative samples for a broad database. It is logical that MDP should use the established Pesticide Data Program as a model sampling plan to provide data that is statistically reliable and defensible. Samples are collected by trained personnel as close to the point of consumption as possible. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) provide criteria for site selection, shipping, aseptic handling and

packing of samples, as well as chain of custody. SOPs are updated as needed and serve as references during program sampling reviews, ensuring that program goals and objectives are reached.

MDP is not a regulatory program, consequently the individual states will decide what follow up action they will take if a sample is positive for a food borne pathogen. While the program is not designed to identify the source of the contamination it is a snap shot in time and a positive step in generating valuable information for the public, the produce industry, and to regulators. At the same time MDP will enhance state regulatory programs by allowing them to concentrate their attention on commodities that are shown to have a higher level of microbiological contamination, and by helping to advance technology with the development of rapid methods for the detection of human pathogens analyzed in fresh fruits and vegetables. As in the case of PDP, we can expect that the data generated by MDP will be beneficial in marketing US-grown commodities in the global market place.

The participating states have a field force in place to collect and ship samples and the laboratories have the capacity, technology and trained personnel to rapidly analyze large numbers of fresh produce for pathogens. Structured as it is, MDP could provide an effective national sampling and testing network, ready for utilization if needed in responding to a bio terrorism event.

In conclusion, Florida realizes this program will be a valuable source of information as well as a unique opportunity to collaborate with many state and federal agencies in the government's response to food safety issues, protecting public health, and providing data needed for the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA). We look forward with motivation, confidence, and dedication to this partnership in our mutual goal of providing the nation a safe and healthy food supply.