

AMS NEWS RELEASE

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USDA INITIATES MICROBIOLOGICAL DATA PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, Feb. 5, 2001 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced the initiation of the Microbiological Data Program (MDP). The goal of MDP, administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), is to collect information regarding the prevalence of foodborne pathogens on domestic and imported fresh fruit and vegetables. The program is not regulatory in nature.

AMS plans to use the USDA Pesticide Data Program infrastructure currently in place for sampling, laboratory testing, and data reporting. Informational needs, such as specific commodities to be tested, foodborne pathogens of interest, and detection methodologies are under consideration. AMS will coordinate program planning activities with the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration.

AMS and National Agricultural Statistics Service statisticians will design appropriate sampling plans based on per capita consumption, marketplace availability, and product origin. Samples will be obtained at terminal markets and chain store distribution centers.

Data collection and testing will be carried out with the support of 10 states -- California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin -- through cooperative agreements with their respective Departments of Agriculture. AMS will provide quality assurance oversight and laboratory and administrative support to the program.

The data generated from MDP will be available to Federal and State public health agencies and industry for food safety decision-making purposes. The information may also be used to establish benchmarks to evaluate the efficacy of good agricultural and manufacturing practices to reduce or eliminate harmful foodborne microorganisms and thus improve the quality and wholesomeness of the fresh produce supply.