

Consumer Confidence in the Safety of the U.S. Food Supply Drops Following Peanut Butter Contamination Incident

New Continuous Consumer Food Safety/Defense Tracking Study Shows Less than One in Four Consumers Believe the U.S. Food Supply is Safer than it was a Year Ago

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MINNEAPOLIS / ST. PAUL (2/23/2009) – Findings from a new Continuous Consumer Food Safety/Defense Tracking Study (CFST) conducted jointly by The Food Industry Center at the University of Minnesota, and the Louisiana State University AgCenter shows that following the January nationwide salmonella outbreak linked to peanut butter products, consumer confidence in the ongoing safety of the U.S. food supply has fallen to 22.5%.

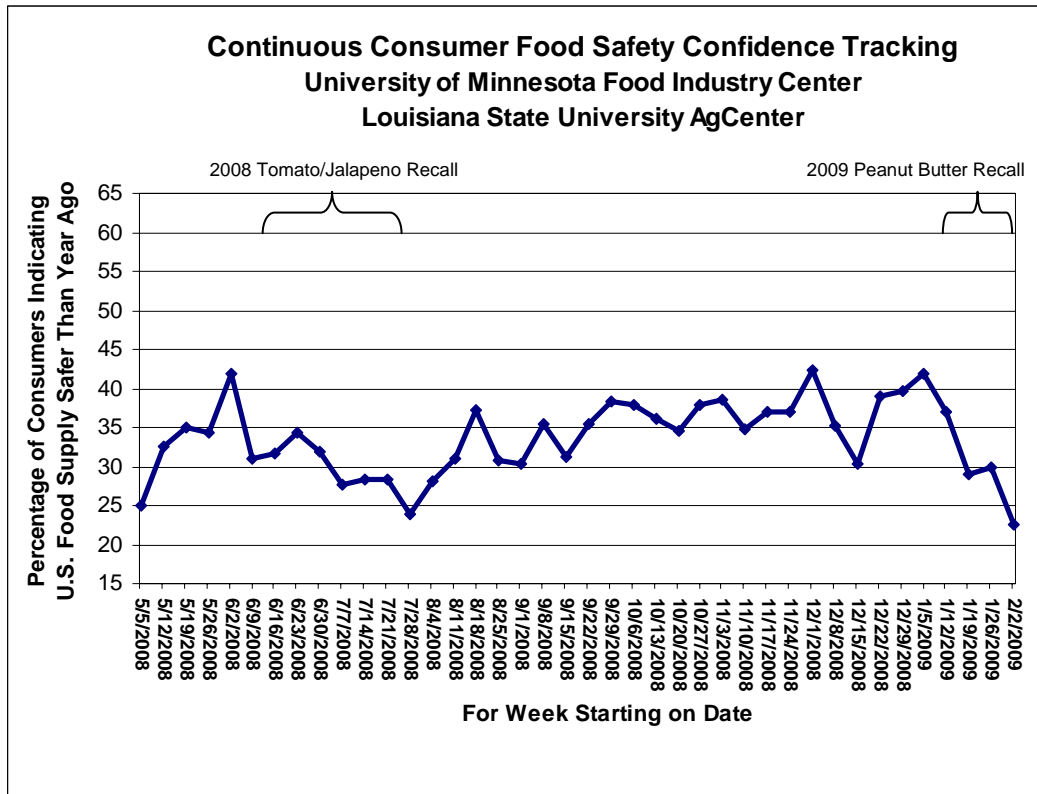
More than 500 people in 43 states have gotten sick in the outbreak. Salmonella infections give people diarrhea and other abdominal symptoms, and sometimes are fatal. Eight deaths are linked to the outbreak.

The Study was initiated the week of May 5th, 2008, and has been continuously tracking consumer confidence in the safety of the food supply, as well as preparedness of the food supply chain for terrorism. It involves a weekly on-line survey of a nationally balanced sample of approximately 175 consumers selected each week from a National On-Line Panel administered by TNS – a major independent marketing research company. The study is funded by the National Center for Food Protection and Defense.

Several measures are being collected on an ongoing basis to monitor consumer concerns, expectations and perceptions of the safety of the food supply from natural/accidental contamination, and the defense of the food supply from deliberate contamination from an act of terrorism. These measures will soon be used to develop a composite food confidence indicator – similar to the Consumer Sentiment Index.

One of the key questions being asked is “In thinking about food safety, that is the natural or accidental contamination of food, do you think the U.S. food supply is safer than it was a year ago?” Consumers are asked to respond using a 6 point scale ranging from 6 = Definitely Safer to 1 = Definitely Not Safer. The percent

indicating a 6, 5 or 4 (on the safer side of the scale) are shown in the graph below.



The trend shows that consumer confidence in the safety of the food supply has declined in a manner that is very similar to a decline observed in June/July following a recall of Tomatoes and Jalapeno Peppers also due to salmonella contamination (although in that outbreak, the source was first thought to be due to tomatoes, it was later traced to Jalapeno Peppers). It appears that the Peanut Butter incident has had even a more immediate and significant impact on consumer perceptions to date.