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FACT Applauds the Obama Administration on Food Safety Final FDA Rule Expected to Prevent 80,000 Salmonella Infections Each Year

Chicago, IL – Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT) praised the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for publishing a final rule requiring egg producers to protect the public from foodborne illness caused by *Salmonella enteritidis* (SE). Salmonella bacteria cause over one million cases of foodborne illness each year. SE is the most common type of Salmonella and can be found in raw and undercooked eggs.

The final rule requires that steps to control the spread of SE be followed during the production of shell eggs in poultry houses. On-farm controls are necessary in the case of SE because, unlike other forms of Salmonella, SE can infect the ovaries of laying hens and grow in an egg before the shell is formed. According to FDA's final rule, egg producers must now test their poultry houses for SE at mandatory points during the life of the flock. If SE is found, immediate egg testing follows. If these tests are positive the producer must not sell the raw shell eggs but rather further process the eggs to destroy the bacteria or divert the eggs to a non-food use.

FACT believes the final SE rule is an improvement over the draft rule originally published in 2004. For example, the final rule revises the timing of the on-farm SE tests to increase the likelihood that infected flocks will be detected. The final rule also clarifies that farms that allow their laying hens access to the outdoors can meet the new standards. While there is no evidence that free range flocks are at increased risk for SE, the original rule suggested that outdoor access was a risk because of potential contacts between hens and wild birds. FACT advocated strongly for these and other important changes that were included in the final rule.

“This rule is an historic step because, for the first time, American farmers will be required to control and reduce foodborne bacteria within their farm gates,” stated Richard Wood, FACT’s Executive Director. “Efforts to control foodborne bacteria such as Salmonella have focused primarily on food processing plants or food preparation facilities. Farms have an important role to play in a ‘farm-to-fork’ food safety system.”

The final SE rule was years in the making. In 1998, FACT participated in initial stakeholder meetings on ways to reduce illness from SE. FACT was able to play a dual role as both an egg producer and a consumer advocacy organization because it operated a model egg laying business with cage free hens and stringent Salmonella controls. Since then, FACT has participated in discussions with the FDA and the egg industry urging the publication of a final SE rule that included both environmental testing and stringent controls on farms where hens are raised.

“This major victory for public health was achieved because the federal government, the egg industry, and consumer groups all recognized that SE on egg farms needed to be reduced,” Wood added.

Founded in 1982, FACT is a Chicago based non-profit dedicated to making farms healthier and more humane places to raise food animals through research, advocacy and education. For more information, please contact Richard Wood at (773) 525-4952 or visit www.foodanimalconcerns.org.

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