



United States Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Research Service  
**Food Safety Research Information Office**  
**FSRIO**

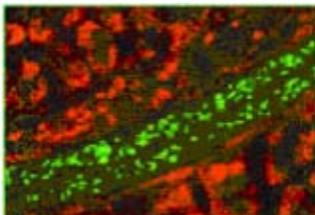
**FOOD SAFETY RESEARCH: A FOCUS ON**

**E. coli O157:H7**

In the United States it is estimated that more than 73,000 infections and 61 deaths occur from E. coli O157:H7 each year. The O157:H7 serotype is a rare variety of E. coli that produces large quantities of one or more related potent toxins, causing severe damage to the lining of the intestine.

Since E.coli bacteria are present throughout the environment, there is always the potential to ingest the bacteria. Very young and elderly victims to E.coli O157:H7 can develop hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), characterized by renal failure and hemolytic anemia. In the elderly, HUS, fever, and neurologic symptoms, constitute thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP). This illness can have a mortality rate in the elderly as high as 50 percent.

The potential damage of E.coli O157:H7 to humans has created a need to address several challenges from the farm-to-table, including educating consumers on cooking ground beef thoroughly, increasing the safety of ground beef through the use of irradiation, developing farm and slaughterhouse-based methods to decrease meat contamination, and identifying ways to prevent contamination of foods that are eaten raw.



*Green E. coli invading cut leaf lettuce. Image by Marian Wachtel.*

**FSRIO Web site: A Resource for Food Safety Research Projects**

For detailed information and descriptions of E. coli-related research projects, search the Food Safety Research database at [www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio/fsresearch.htm](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio/fsresearch.htm)

The ARS National Program 108 Food Safety Progress Report 2002 Section 1: Cattle and Swine

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio/ppd/ars010.htm>



*Regular feedings can suppress E. coli O157:H7 growth in the intestines of cattle. Image by Jack Dykinga.*

**RESEARCH AREAS**

E. coli O157:H7 control methods in minimally processed fruits and vegetables and ruminants.

Survey retail markets and industry as reservoirs of pathogenic organisms for further investigation, regulation, and modification of production and handling.

Physical and chemical sanitation of fresh produce and sprout seeds to decrease risk.

Antimicrobial resistance patterns of antibiotic use of E. coli isolated from calves.

Risk assesment of 60-day aging process of unpasteurized, hard cheeses.

**GENERAL FACTS**

- The bacterium E. coli belongs to the Family Enterobacteriaceae and was first isolated in 1885 by Theodor Escherich.
- In 1982, E. coli O157:H7 was identified by the Centers for Disease Control as an emerging foodborne pathogen.
- Infections are usually caused by consuming undercooked, contaminated ground beef, unpasteurized milk, and the surfaces of minimally processed fruits and vegetables.
- E. coli O157:H7 is also an emerging waterborne pathogen. In 1999 outbreaks were linked to contaminated water supplies and swimming areas in New York and Washington.
- Consumers can reduce the risk of infection by cooking ground beef thoroughly, drinking pasteurized milk, thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables, drinking disinfectant-treated municipal water, and avoiding swallowing lake or pool water while swimming.
- Organically-grown foods are equally susceptible to E. coli O157:H7 contamination.
- One hamburger pattie may contain the meat of several animals from four different countries. One contaminated carcass shredded for hamburger meat can pollute 8 tons of finished ground beef.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

### **E. coli O157:H7 and Foodborne Illness -- KSU Agricultural Experiment Station and CES**

<http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/FNTR2/MF2138.PDF>

### **E. coli O157:H7 in Drinking Water -- EPA**

<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/ecoli.html>

### **E. coli: Unwelcome from Farm to Fork -- USDA/ARS**

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/oct00/ecoli1000.pdf>

### **Economics of Foodborne Disease: E. coli -- USDA/ERS**

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodborneDisease/ecoli/>

### **Escherichia coli O157:H7 -- CDC/Division of Bacterial and Mycotic Diseases**

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/escherichiacoli\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/escherichiacoli_g.htm)

### **E. coli O157:H7 - A Potential Health Concern -- UF Cooperative Extension Service**

[http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/BODY\\_SS197](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/BODY_SS197)

### **Bacteriological Analytical Manual Online, Chapter 4: Enumeration of Escherichia coli and the Coliform Bacteria -- FDA/CFSAN**

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~ebam/bam-4.html>

### **Escherichia coli O157:H7 -- FDA/CFSAN Bad Bug Book**

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/chap15.html>

### **Guidance for Minimizing the Risk of Escherichia coli O157:H7 and Salmonella in Beef Slaughter Operations -- International HACCP Alliance**

<http://haccpalliance.org/alliance/BeefSlaughterGuide.pdf>

### **News and Information: Escherichia coli O157:H7 -- USDA/FSIS**

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/topics/o157.htm>



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The Food Safety Research Information Office (FSRIO) publicly launched its web site, [www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio), on July 2, 2001, in support of the National Food Safety Initiative.

A key component of the web site is a database of food safety research projects. The database is a resource for researchers and administrators to assess food safety research needs and priorities, thereby minimizing duplication of effort. FSRIO was established in accordance with H.R. 2534 Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reauthorization Act of 1997, SEC. 503.

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