US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE ADOPTS GUIDELINES FROM STOP FOODBORNE ILLNESS COALITION FOR NEW POULTRY SAFETY PROGRAM

CHICAGO, October 19, 2021 – Earlier today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced new efforts to reduce *Salmonella*-related illnesses associated with poultry. The agency has committed to launching research and action on multiple fronts to reduce *Salmonella* illnesses by 25% by 2030. Chicago-based STOP Foodborne Illness, the national public health nonprofit, was instrumental in driving the agency's action and developing a coalition of organizations and advocates that petitioned the government to take action.

"We are gratified and grateful that Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and his team recognize the critical need to secure our nation's poultry food supply and reduce *Salmonella* contamination as a public health concern," said Mitzi Baum, CEO of STOP, which drafted the proposal petition to the USDA. "Each year, more than one million people suffer from illnesses directly related to *Salmonella* poisoning that originates in chicken or turkey meat. Today's action is an important step toward strengthening the nation's food supply. We're pleased to have played a role in calling attention to the issue and to assist as the USDA's plan moves forward."

The new initiatives will be under the supervision of USDA Deputy Under Secretary Sandra Eskin, who said, "Reducing *Salmonella* infections attributable to poultry is one of the Department's top priorities. Time has shown that our current policies are not moving us closer to our public health goal. It's time to rethink our approach."

According to the USDA, the effort will leverage the agency's strong research capabilities and strengthen FSIS' partnership with the Research, Education and Economics (REE) mission area to address data gaps and develop new laboratory methods to guide future *Salmonella* policy. Meanwhile, the National Advisory Committee for Microbiological Criteria in Foods, an independent federal advisory committee, will be asked to advise on how FSIS can build on the latest science to improve its approach to *Salmonella* control. Since it is not just the presence or absence of *Salmonella,* but the quantity of bacteria that can impact the likelihood of illness, FSIS will examine how quantification can be incorporated into this approach. Moreover, with emerging science suggesting that not all *Salmonella* are equally likely to cause human illness, FSIS will focus on the *Salmonella* serotypes and the virulence factors that pose the greatest public health risk.

For Stop Foodborne Illness Board Member Amanda Craten, the news is long-overdue and welcome. Craten, who participated in a call with the Secretary Vilsack and the USDA, noted the debilitating and long-lasting impact *Salmonella* poisoning has had on her eight-year-old son, Noah. "On behalf of Noah and the constituents impacted by severe foodborne illness, I want to express my deepest gratitude. I am confident that we can collaborate to create a new system that is science based, risk based, and enforceable. For me, it is a bridge to trust in food again."