

## **1. Heading**

H.B. No. XXXX

Session: 119th Congress, 2025-2026

Sponsor: John Fay

## **2. The Title**

An Act relating to the transition towards clean-foods agricultural and food auditing practices.

## **3. Enacting Clause**

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the United States of America

### **Section 1. Short Title:**

This Act may be cited as the “Investment in Clean-Food Systems and Food Safety Trust Act”.

### **Section 2. Purpose/Findings:**

WHEREAS The United States federal food auditing system is responsible for the enforcement of federal food safety standards through preemptive inspections and response to breaches of food safety; AND

WHEREAS The United States federal food auditing system upholds the auditing standards that comprise the federal food safety baseline and provides food safety certificates to compliant interstate food producers; AND

WHEREAS The responsibilities of federal food safety auditing is the responsibility of more than sixteen federal organizations, with additional auditing work being performed by state and private auditing systems; AND

WHEREAS Roughly 48 million Americans fall ill from food-borne illnesses annually, with 128,000 being hospitalized, and 3,000 dying per year; AND

WHEREAS Federal food safety auditing systems regularly struggle to meet the desired number of workers and inspectors, particularly after recent job cuts at federal food auditing organizations; AND

WHEREAS American public trust towards federal food safety auditing systems has reached an all-time low among U.S. adults; AND

WHEREAS The American public consistently express concerns over bacterial food-borne illnesses, carcinogens and pesticides, and food additives and ingredients as their greatest food safety concerns; AND

WHEREAS The most common solution offered by the American public to increase confidence in the federal food safety system is a better understanding of how food producers and the government currently ensure food safety, as well as how the government responds to food safety breaches; NOW BE IT THEREFORE

RESOLVED, That the United States federal food auditing system will strengthen federal food safety programs through:

1. Promoting the transition to clean-food practices among United States food producers and companies
2. Increasing application and retention rates among state food safety auditing programs
3. Improving public trust in the federal food auditing system

**Section 3. Definitions:**

*For purposes of this article, the following terms have the following meanings:*

*Clean-food practices* are defined as agricultural and food processing practices in compliance with the current U.S. Food and Drug Administration Food Code, with emphasis on reducing

contamination of food products, particularly those with the added benefits of promoting minimal food processing and environmentally sustainable food systems.

*Food producers* are defined as all those engaged in the work of growing, processing, shipping, or selling food items.

#### **Section 4. Substantive Provisions:**

- (1) Voluntary training for American food producers to learn clean-food practices through a free of charge, standardized in-person or digital clean-food transition program.

Educational program shall include–

- (a) Reintroduction to food safety auditing standards
- (b) Suggestions for steps towards greater food safety practice
- (c) Suggestions for environmentally sustainable alterations to agricultural and business systems
- (d) Overview of further programs and funding opportunities related to clean-food practices
- (e) Overview of alternatives to the use of certain fertilizers, agricultural sprays, and chemical food additives
- (f) Achievement of certificate at the end of a self-paced training system

- (2) Competitive grant program for the transition to clean-food practices after the completion of the educational program.

(a) Eligible uses of funds–

- (i) Replacing the use of potentially harmful pesticides, fertilizers, and food additives

- (ii) Improving natural disaster and climate change resilience for food supply systems
- (iii) Any alternative suggestion given by the food producer, with a written explanation to be assessed by designated federal staff

(b) Fund Procurement–

- (i) Fund applicants will be required to complete a standardized form including a line-item budget, brief overview of intended use, and
- (ii) Determination of application status will be consistent with the grant administration process described in the FDA Staff Manual Guides, Volume III
- (iii) Grant applications shall not be considered on the basis of demographic information

(c) Fund Limitations–

- (i) Number of grants allotted by this Act shall not exceed an annual sum of 500
- (ii) Previous grant winners may reapply, but must demonstrate at least partial completion of the project that the previous grant funded
- (iii) Grant value may fall under, but shall not exceed, \$10,000 U.S. dollars

Increase Funding and Incentives for State-Level Food Safety Research and Auditing.

- (1) Increase application and retention rates in state-level food auditing and food safety research with a program targeting food safety auditors and researchers. Federal funding will go to state governments to allow for the development of programs that-

- (a) Promote tenure and pension benefits while ensuring a commitment to job security

- (b) Provide greater opportunities for hybrid or flexible work models
- (c) Opportunity to increase across-the-board pay as determined by state legislatures
- (d) Expand student loan repayment systems

Improving Public Trust Through Education and Transparency.

- (1) Establishment of a public outreach program by the Department of Agriculture to improve public understanding of–
  - (a) Federal food safety auditing and response systems
  - (b) Food safety certification
  - (c) Food labeling and ingredient disclosures
  - (d) Personal food safety and clean-food practices

**Section 5: Enforcement/Administration:**

To be enforced by the United States Department of Agriculture, with the support of a collaborative team of other participatory or relevant organizations.

**Metrics for Accountability and Success:**

The metrics for accountability and success will include a cumulative analysis of growth rates of state-level food safety auditing programs, educational program completion, rates of public trust in United States food auditing, and frequency of food-borne outbreaks.

**Sunset Clause:**

The provisions of this Article expire automatically five years after enactment.

**5. Analysis of Research**

Throughout this research, a recurring theme was fragmentation in federal systems that limited food safety efficiency. This can first be seen by the fact that national food auditing is under the purview of upwards of sixteen federal organizations. This distribution of

responsibilities has created fragmented food-safety efforts. Using a well-known example given by the Government Accountability Office, “FDA has primary responsibility for regulating manufacturers of frozen cheese pizzas, FSIS has primary responsibility for regulating manufacturers of frozen pizzas with meat, and multiple additional federal agencies play roles in regulating the components of either type of pizza”. In a system already functioning under splintered responsibilities, chronic failure to reach desired levels of staff have made the momentous task of controlling the nation’s food safety surveillance and response even more difficult. This has only grown more precarious in recent months, with job cuts that removed thousands of workers from key federal food auditing organizations, particularly in the area of active surveillance. A March 2025 decision announced by the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services to cut 3,500 jobs at the FDA, 2,400 at the CDC, and 1,200 at the NIH. These cuts correlate with the CDC decision to limit the focus of their active surveillance groups towards fewer food-borne diseases.

Extending this idea of fragmentation, the federal agricultural system also lacks a unified program providing up-to-date information on the topics of food auditing and food safety. Rather, current voluntary educational programs consist of many courses offered from a variety of departments and private institutions with discordant focuses. This system risks giving an esoteric impression of food safety and clean-food practices to the American public, with the field’s confusing environment dissuading some from pursuing beneficial educational programs. This bill will attempt to resolve this problem by creating a new course that overviews modern clean-food practices in a standardized and approachable manner, backed by all the federal food safety organizations. A standardized educational course would also create a consistent measure

of an individual's understanding of the topic, which will prove useful in determining how to distribute the bill's grants.

To respond to the struggling capabilities of the federal food safety auditing system, this bill also attempts to reinforce the food safety auditing capabilities of the states. The United States federal government has demonstrated a desire to shrink an already struggling federal system. In April 2025, the Food and Drug Administration lost 19% of their employees in a wave of layoffs. Currently, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention is also experiencing the risk of losing roughly \$600 million in federal public grants for four states. This bill's emphasis on fostering state-level food auditing and research allows the United States to respond to threats to the food safety system while avoiding both the instability and brain-drain effect currently found at the federal level and the further fragmentation at the level of private auditing businesses.

Alongside fragmentation, a second trend of rapidly declining trust among Americans for the federal food safety auditing system was discovered. Gallup's 2024 study on the topic found that trust in the government's ability to ensure food safety has reached an all-time low among U.S. adults. Only 57% of U.S. adults report a "great deal" or "fair amount" of trust in government food auditing, an 11% decline from the same measurement in 2019. At the same time, only 11% of Americans are "very confident" in the safety of the U.S. food supply.

According to the same report, the key food safety issue among Americans is food-borne illness from bacteria, which was ranked among the top three food safety concerns in 50% of responses. Carcinogens and pesticides concerns were ranked just lower than bacteria, and concern about food additives and ingredients is the fastest rising topic, increasing its appearance among top three concerns from 30% to 36% in just the past year. When the report asked what steps would make the American public more confident in the safety of the U.S. food supply

system, the most popular ideas include understanding how food companies and the government currently ensure food safety. Another 34% believe that their confidence in the food auditing system would increase with a better understanding of how the government responds to breaches in food safety. The subsection of the bill focused on public education will address these trends, offering the American public a clear guide of the processes and protective measures of the United States food auditing system, alongside advice on how to best protect their own health and safety.

The government stakeholders of this project would include the multiple federal government organizations and departments related to food auditing and agricultural practices, as well as those found at the state level. Private stakeholders are food producers, defined here as the growers, processors, manufacturers, distributors, and providers of food, as well as the general public as consumers.

## **6. A description of its bipartisan appeal**

This bill will likely find its greatest Republican support among those also supporting the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission. MAHA has expressed desire to expand research on disease and health concerns, decrease the use of harmful chemicals in food products, improve food labeling, and increase public awareness on the topics of nutrition and health. Further Republican support might be found among those representing regions with predominantly farming or rural populations, with both of these demographics increasingly aligned with the Republican Party. The choice to keep the educational programs optional and avoid the use of rhetoric that favors the Democrat Party will assist in avoiding the alienation of potential Republican supporters.

Democrats will likely also gather in support of the bill's environmentalist goals.

Democratic Congressional members voted in favor of pro-environmental legislation in over 90% of 2023 legislative cases. The bill's environmentally friendly objectives are likely to be backed by the Democratic party for this reason, matching the party's eco-friendly agenda.

Moreover, growing concerns about food safety and food additives has become an increasingly bipartisan topic in modern U.S. politics. When surveying American parents from both parties, 68% reported "highly processed foods" to be a major or the biggest threat to their child. At the same time, legislators from both parties have increasingly spoken against unregulated toxic food chemicals and ultraprocessed foods. In 2025, a bipartisan force of 157 state legislators demonstrated support for preserving the right of state governments to regulate toxic food chemicals. Simultaneously in California, a Democratic bill advocating for healthier school lunches received near-unanimous Republican support. The bill's attention on clean-food practices will tap into a growing bipartisan demand for such legislation, attracting support from Congressional representatives regardless of party.

The economic implications of this bill also introduce the potential for bipartisan appeal. It is predicted that the economic cost of food borne illnesses on the United States economy was \$17.6 billion dollars per year in 2018, a cumulation of medical care, lost earnings, and the monetary measure of deaths. With voters from both parties in 2024 consistently ranking the economy as one of their top three areas of concern, the opportunity of bolstering the economy will serve as further reinforcement for the bipartisan value of the bill.

## **7. Procedural/Administrative Provisions:**

Severability Clause: If any provision of this Act is found to be invalid by a court decision, the remainder of this Act shall survive.

## **8. Summary/Digest:**

A bill to promote clean-food practices, strengthen state food safety systems, and improve public trust in the federal food safety system through education and transparency.

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