FARMFORWARD

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TAXPAYER-FUNDED CONTAMINATION: HOW THE USDA SUPPLIES POULTRY WITH SALMONELLA TO THE NATION'S MOST VULNERABLE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children sitting down to lunch at school, seniors waiting for their food delivery to arrive each month, families lined up at the community food bank—some of the most vulnerable Americans rely on federal food assistance to meet their basic needs. Already burdened with the weight of hunger and food insecurity, in reasonable circumstances they could at least trust that the federally-supplied food products they receive are free from contaminants that will make them sick.

But the truth is, some of these products are likely to be contaminated.

Salmonella, a leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States, sickens over a million people each year. Raw poultry is one of its most common sources—and not just in grocery stores. USDA knowingly purchases raw poultry from slaughter and processing plants with high levels of salmonella contamination for federally funded nutrition programs that serve some of the nation's most vulnerable communities: children, seniors, and Americans with low income.

Farm Forward's recent deep dive into the federal government's regulations and enforcement of salmonella standards, levels of contamination in the poultry industry, and federal commodity pro-curement for nutrition assistance programs resulted in three key findings:

- USDA purchases meat from companies it ***knows to be highly contaminated*** **and distributes it to its nutrition assistance programs** that serve America's school children, seniors, and individuals facing hunger.
- Food assistance programs very likely receive contaminated poultry, and no one is tracking the scale of the problem.
- USDA does not protect the public from salmonella in raw poultry.

This represents a triple failure by the federal government. First, USDA, the agency tasked with protecting the public from foodborne illness, has set food safety standards that allow for high rates of salmonella contamination in raw poultry and put consumers at risk. Second, USDA has allowed many of the nation's largest poultry producers, including familiar names like Butterball, Perdue, and Foster Farms, to repeatedly fail these already low standards with zero consequences. Finally, the government continues to acquire meat from these same failing companies for school lunches and other federal nutrition programs.

USDA sets a zero-tolerance policy for salmonella contamination in certain meat products that it buys and distributes to people for nutrition assistance (boneless and ground beef, cooked diced chicken, and eggs). However, USDA sets no such requirement for raw poultry the agency purchases for schools, seniors, and food-insecure individuals, despite poultry causing 1 in 4 cases of salmonellosis (salmonella poisoning) each year.[1] The shortcomings in USDA's salmonella policies and practices regarding salmonella in raw poultry expose potentially dangerous gaps in food systems policy in the United States. Children and families deserve better.

1 CDC Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration, "Foodborne Illness Source Attribution Estimates for Salmonella, Escherichia coli O157, and Listeria monocytogenes – United States, 2022," GA and D.C.: U.S., December 13, 2024.

BACKGROUND

In the US, 1 in 7 households (47 million people) experience hunger and food insecurity, and 1 in 5 (or more than 13 million) children don't have enough food to meet their nutritional needs.[2] The effects of hunger and malnutrition can be serious and long-lasting, leading to diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. Child hunger compromises physical and cognitive development, leads to health problems (like anemia and asthma), and negatively affects academic performance.[3] Food insecure individuals and families rely heavily on federal nutrition assistance programs, like the National School Lunch Program and the Emergency Food Assistance Program, to meet their basic needs. What they may not know, and do not have power over, is the risk of receiving food contaminated with foodborne illnesses like salmonella.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), salmonella is "a leading cause of foodborne illnesses," accounting for 13% of foodborne illness cases each year, and salmonellosis is the leading cause of deaths linked to foodborne illness in the United States.[4] The CDC reports that only 1 in 30 cases is diagnosed, but estimates that there are roughly 1.28 million cases in the U.S. each year, including 12,500 hospitalizations and 238 deaths.[5] Certain populations receiving food assistance—young children, seniors, pregnant women, and people with underlying health conditions (including those caused by chronic malnutrition)—are most susceptible to severe illness from salmonella, exacerbating the risks associated with eating contaminated food.[6]

There are roughly 1.28 million cases of salmonellosis each year, including 12,500 hospitalizations and 238 deaths.

Chicken and turkey meats alone account for 25% of all confirmed salmonella outbreaks[7] (or 320,000 cases each year), and the CDC estimates that "1 in every 25 packages of chicken at the grocery store are contaminated with *Salmonella*."[8] In a recent study by Consumer Reports, however, researchers found that the number is likely much higher: **one-third of samples of ground chicken they tested from grocery stores across the country were contaminated with salmonella,** and more than

2 Feeding America, "Hunger in America," accessed October 9, 2025.

3 Feeding America, "Facts About Child Hunger," accessed October 9, 2025.

4 Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "About Salmonella Infection," October 4, 2024; CDC, "Estimates: Burden of Foodborne Illness in the United States," March 19, 2025.

5 CDC, "About Salmonella Infection," accessed October 1, 2025; "Estimates: Burden of Foodborne Illness in the United States," accessed October 1, 2025.

6 CDC, "People at Increased Risk for Food Poisoning."

7 CDC Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration, "Foodborne Illness Source Attribution Estimates for Salmonella , Escherichia coli O157, and Listeria monocytogenes – United States, 2022," GA and D.C.: U.S., December 13, 2024. Salmonella infections occur in backyard poultry in addition to commercial poultry, but the number of cases in backyard poultry is comparatively very low; for instance, there were an estimated 7,866 cases caused by backyard poultry between 2015 and 2022 compared with an estimated 2.24 million from commercial poultry. For backyard poultry data, see: G.S. Stapleton et al., "Multistate Outbreaks of Salmonellosis Linked to Contact with Backyard Poultry—United States, 2015-2022," *Zoonoses Public Health* 71, no. 6 (2024): 708-722.

8 CDC, "Chicken and Food Poisoning," April 29, 2024.

one-third of these were from Perdue (one of the top chicken companies in the country).[9]

The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) sets ineffective salmonella performance standards for poultry and lacks the authority to enforce even its own weak standards.

Animal-based foods (chicken, turkey, pork, eggs, beef, dairy, and seafood) are primary sources of salmonella contamination in the food system,[10] Conditions in industrial animal agriculture—high-density confinement housing, poor waste management, unsanitary conditions, and unhealthy, immunocompromised animals—create breeding grounds for zoonotic pathogens like salmonellae.[11]

Farm Forward's latest research shows that children, seniors, low-income families, and tribal communities are put at risk by USDA purchasing contaminated raw poultry for federal nutrition assistance programs. The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) sets ineffective salmonella performance standards for poultry and lacks the authority to enforce even its own weak standards. Even those producers that meet FSIS standards can have shockingly high rates of contamination (e.g., plants that have up to 25% of ground chicken contaminated with salmonella meet the standard).[12] **Plants that fail the standard, rated as Category 3—the worst of three categories[13]—include those operated by major brands like Perdue, Foster Farms, and Butterball, yet they continue to sell contaminated products without con-sequence.** See Appendix A for definitions of performance standards and allowable percentages of contamination. View our **full report** for more details on how these regulatory gaps allow dangerous levels of salmonella to persist in the poultry supply.

9 Lisa L. Gill, "Is Our Ground Meat Safe to Eat?," *Consumer Reports*, June 30, 2022.

10 World Health Organization (WHO), "Salmonella (non-typhoidal)," February 20, 2018; S. Shaji, R.K. Selvaraj, R. Shanmugasundaram, "Salmonella Infection in Poultry: A Review on the Pathogen and Control Strategies," *Microorganisms* 11, no. 11: 2814.

11 Matthew N. Hayek, "The Infectious Disease Trap of Animal Agriculture," *Scientific Advances* 8, no. 44 (2022).

12 USDA-FSIS, "Performance Standards: Salmonella Verification Program for Raw Poultry Products," Directive 10250.2, March 2, 2021.

13 USDA-FSIS, FSIS Salmonella Verification Testing Program, Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting. Note: The three categories are defined as the following: Category 1, the best rating, means that an establishment has been at or below half of the mandated standard; Category 2 means that establishments have met the standard; Category 3 is reserved for establishments that are above the maximum allowable percentages and, thus, fail the standard. The maximum allowable percentages are specific to different types of poultry: they are highest in comminuted (finely minced or ground) chicken and turkey products (25% and 13.5% respectively) and chicken parts (15.4%), while chicken carcasses allow for 9.8% and turkey carcasses for 7.1%. Salmonella performance standard category determinations are based on a minimum number of salmonella sample results being available from a 52-week moving window.

USDA PURCHASES MEAT FROM COMPANIES WITH CONTAMINATED PLANTS *FOR FEDERAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS*

Farm Forward's investigation uncovered how federal nutrition assistance programs are sourcing raw poultry from companies that have high rates of salmonella contamination. USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Commodity Procurement Program purchases domestically produced foods through USDA Foods, which are then distributed through federal Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) programs, including:

- **USDA Foods in Schools** (for the National School Lunch Program),
- the **Commodity Supplemental Food Program** (serving seniors with low income),
- the **Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations,** and
- the **Emergency Food Assistance Program** (supplying food banks and soup kitchens).

Each of these programs provides critical nutrition assistance to vulnerable populations. The National School Lunch Program serves 4.7 billion lunches per year in schools across the country.[14] The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) supports more than 8.7 million seniors each year.[15] The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) provides an alternative to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for nearly 50,000 Indigenous individuals with low income living on or near reservations.[16] The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) supplies food for local agencies and organizations to distribute in communities, through food banks, soup kitchens, food pantries, and more.[17] Although USDA does not track the number of people served by TEFAP, Feeding America—one of the primary recipients of TEFAP food distribution—estimated that they served 1.25 billion meals in the 2023/2024 fiscal year through support from this program.[18] In short, these programs form the backbone of food assistance through supplying billions of meals each year to people suffering from hunger and food insecurity. Despite their important role in nutrition services, **USDA knowingly purchases meat from plants highly contaminated with salmonella** and distributes those products through these programs.

In 2024, AMS paid more than $686 million for more than 403 million pounds of poultry products from 26 different companies.[19] AMS purchases are made through a competitive bidding process where the agency maintains a

14 USDA Economic Research Service, "USDA's National School Lunch Program served about 241 billion lunches from fiscal years 1969 through 2023," October 9, 2024.
15 USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), "CSFP Factsheet," accessed October 9, 2025.
16 USDA FNS, "FDPIR Fact Sheet," accessed October 9, 2025.
17 USDA FNS, "TEFAP Fact Sheet," accessed October 9, 2025.
18 Feeding America, "The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)," accessed October 9, 2025.
19 USDA-AMS, "FY24 Purchases by Commodity," accessed October 10, 2025.

list of approved suppliers who are then invited to submit bids for AMS contracts.[20] AMS sets requirements for food products that it purchases, but does not establish its own standards for salmonella contamination in raw poultry. It follows the FSIS standards that allow high rates of contamination, putting children and people with low incomes at risk of salmonella poisoning through these assistance programs.

As it turns out, AMS awards contracts to companies it knows have high rates of contamination in their plants. Farm Forward analyzed AMS purchase records and found that, from 2022 to 2024, numerous companies selling raw poultry to AMS had Category 3 violations, including household brand names like Butterball, Cargill, Foster Poultry Farms, and Tyson.[21] (For more details and a full list of companies, see Appendix C.) These findings reveal the potential for contaminated poultry to have entered the AMS procurement supply chain for nutrition programs serving school lunches, seniors, and communities with low income.

We identified multiple examples of companies selling raw poultry products to AMS from a plant rated as Category 3 for the same type of product at the time of the purchase.

For example, AMS purchased 45,600 cases of chicken leg quarters (categorized as "chicken parts") from Foster Farms' Fresno, CA, plant (P6137A) during a 2024-2025 period when the plant was rated Category 3.[22] The agency also purchased 950,000 cases of chicken drumsticks from the company's Livingston, CA, plant (P6137) during a period in 2024 when the plant received a Category 3 rating.[23] During 2022-2023, AMS purchased more than 2.1 million pounds of chicken breasts from Bachoco O.K. Foods, a food service brand that is one of the largest poultry suppliers to AMS. AMS procured chicken parts from the Bachoco O.K. Foods plant (P165M) in Muldrow, OK, when the plant was rated Category 3 for chicken parts. See Appendix D for purchases from plants with Category 3 ratings during the time of purchase.

The fact that zero-tolerance standards are already in place for some products highlights the fact that AMS can set firm requirements for the meat it purchases, but chooses not to for raw poultry.

Based on available data, the ongoing lack of regulation makes it likely that this pattern continues. AMS has signed new contracts to purchase raw chicken from plants that have been recently rated Category 3. For instance, House of Raeford's Teachey, NC, plant (P737) confirmed a purchase, where deliveries were made in September 2025 for 108,000 pounds of "chicken large chilled"; House of Raeford's whole chicken carcasses at this plant received a Category 3 rating within the last year.

20 See Appendix B "AMS Commodity Procurement Process" for a detailed explanation of product procurement.

21 Risk varies based on producer and type of product (minced and ground turkey from Butterball, Cargill, and Foster Poultry Farms, for instance, carries a high risk of contamination). Farm Forward uncovered these details through tracking the purchasing of products from contaminated plants for 2022 through 2024. We reviewed AMS and FSIS records for specific Category 3 establishments, type of product, and the timing of AMS testing and the AMS purchase award to make these determinations.

22 USDA-FSIS Commodity Procurement Program, "Purchase Award Description: Chicken and Chicken Products, Solicitation PCA, 2000009911 (12-3J14-23-B-0257-0002)," February 23, 2024; USDA-FSIS, "Salmonella Verification Testing: June 02, 2024 through May 31, 2025," accessed September 15, 2025.

23 USDA-AMS Commodity Procurement Program, "Purchase Award Description: Chicken and Chicken Products, Solicitation PCA, 2000009911 (12-3J14-23-B-0257-0002);" USDA-FSIS, "Individual Establishment Salmonella Categories for Each Product for Sample Collection Period September 3, 2023 through August 31, 2024," accessed September 15, 2025.

At least two other companies were con-tracted for new purchases by AMS that have had Category 2 ratings in the last year. (Although Category 2 plants pass the perfor-mance standards, FSIS allows for up to 25% salmonella contamination in some products.) For September 2025, 2.9 million pounds of chicken drumsticks were slated for delivery from Pilgrim's Pride's Mt. Pleasant, TX, plant (P7091A), which rated Category 2 for chicken parts (1 in 6 samples of chicken parts can test positive for salmonella and pass the standard); and Tyson's New Holland, PA, plant (P1325)—with a Category 2 rating for chicken carcasses in the last year—was contracted for a September delivery of 10.8 million pounds of "chicken large chilled" (a product type that allows for a contam-ination rate of 1 in 10). Potential ongoing contracts like this one highlight that the problem of AMS purchasing raw poultry from contaminated plants is not being addressed.

Given these confirmed examples of the prevalence of AMS's past purchasing of raw poultry products from contaminated plants, and how widespread salmonella contamination is in the largest meat and poultry producers, it's likely AMS has purchased, and will continue to purchase, meat contaminated with salmonella.

Stricter AMS regulations on salmonella are both called for and precedented. The agency sets zero-tolerance standards for salmonella in boneless beef, ground beef, diced cooked chicken, and egg products.[24] **The fact that these standards are already in place for some products highlights the fact that AMS can set firm requirements for the meat it purchases, but chooses not to for raw poultry.**

24 USDA-AMS, "Microbiological Testing of AMS Purchased Meat, Poultry and Egg Commodities."

FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS LIKELY RECEIVE CONTAMINATED POULTRY *& NO ONE IS TRACKING THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM*

Because of the lack of adequate tracking and enforcement for salmonella contamination, as well as underreporting of salmonellosis, the scale of the risk for America's most vulnerable populations is unknown. People experiencing food insecurity are more likely to experience barriers to healthcare,[25] deepening the problem of identifying, treating, and reporting instances of salmonella illnesses in these populations. What seems clear is that AMS purchases contaminated raw poultry for nutrition assistance programs, and the rate of salmonella contamination in raw poultry is high. What we cannot quantify—and what is impossible to assess without responsible regulation, tracking, and control of contaminated products—is just how widespread a threat AMS-supplied, salmonella-contaminated poultry is to the country's most vulnerable populations.

There is limited data on the percentage of poultry purchased for the various federal nutrition assistance programs by AMS. The National School Lunch Program, however, offers an example that allows us to glimpse the way nutrition assistance programs may unknowingly receive and serve contaminated poultry to vulnerable communities. Public schools source 40% of all their poultry products through the AMS program.[26] While a significant amount of the poultry consumed in schools are in the form of ready-to-eat (RTE) products, such as nuggets and patties, which can have different standards for salmonella, in 2009/2010 school year (the last year this research was conducted) school districts purchased $9 million dollars' worth of raw poultry.[27]

Between 2009 and 2019, there were 138 confirmed outbreaks of salmonella poisoning in schools in the United States.[28] This likely underrepresents the true figure. Most foodborne illness outbreaks are not documented or confirmed, meaning the number is likely significantly higher. Additionally, in 23% of confirmed school foodborne illness outbreaks, the type of disease is not identified,[29] meaning that even in documented outbreaks, salmonellosis cases may be higher. Further, investigations of sporadic illness from salmonella—those not associated with an outbreak and

25 S. Park et al., "Association of Food Insecurity with Health, Access to Care, Affordability of Care, Financial Burden of Care, and Financial Hardships Among US Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Public Health* 230 (2024): 183-189.
26 Michael Ollinger, John Bovay, Casiano Benicio, and Joanne Guthrie, "Economic Incentives to Supply Safe Chicken to the National School Lunch Program," USDA Economic Research Service, November 2015.
27 Ollinger et al., "Economic Incentives to Supply Safe Chicken to the National School Lunch Program," USDA Economic Research Service, November 2015.
28 C.P. Mattison et al., "Childcare and School Acute Gastroenteritis Outbreaks: 2009-2020," *Pediatrics* 150, no. 5 (2022): e2021056002. Note: an outbreak is defined by two or more cases coming from the same source.
29 Mattison et al., "Childcare and School Acute Gastroenteritis Outbreaks: 2009-2020," *Pediatrics* 150, no. 5 (2022): e2021056002.

which comprise the bulk of cases—are rarely initiated, so the cause is never determined for those cases.

Food banks, tribal assistance programs, and programs for the elderly all depend heavily on food supplied from AMS, but research on AMS purchasing for these programs was beyond our current scope. It's clear that FSIS is aware of at least some salmonella-contaminated products distributed to such programs. For example, when Butterball announced in 2019 the voluntary recall of 39 tons of turkey after salmonella poisoning sickened six people in three states, FSIS released an incomplete list of locations that had received the recalled product, including three food banks, each of which participate in federal food assistance programs that receive foods through AMS procurement:[30] Second Harvest Heartland in Maplewood, Minnesota; Food Bank of Central & Eastern NC in Raleigh, North Carolina; and St. Joseph Food Program in Menasha, Wisconsin.

USDA does not prevent or control salmonella contamination in either the raw poultry purchased by AMS and distributed to these programs or in any other raw poultry that reaches the broader public.

Federal nutrition assistance programs rely on federal oversight of salmonella to ensure the food they distribute is free from contamination. However, USDA does not prevent or control salmonella contamination in either the raw poultry purchased by AMS and distributed to these programs or in any other raw poultry that reaches the broader public, nor does it have the regulatory authority to enforce its own standards (it cannot issue recalls, or stop the sale of contaminated products, let alone suspend operations at plants that fail the standards). The result is a failure to deliver food free from contamination and protect the country's vulnerable populations, at every level: the companies that allow high rates of contamination in the products they sell; USDA's lack of regulation and enforcement of salmonella standards; AMS's purchasing of products from plants it knows to be highly contaminated, and its unwillingness to prohibit poultry companies from selling them contaminated products; and program recipients (e.g., food-insecure school children, seniors, indigenous people, and food bank participants) who do not know that the essential food assistance they receive may be contaminated with salmonella.

30 Second Harvest Heartland, "Commodity Supplemental Food Program," accessed October 10, 2025; WUNC, "USDA cancels $11 million in federal funding for North Carolina food banks," March 13, 2025; Wisconsin Department of Health Services, "The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)," accessed October 10, 2025.

USDA DOES NOT PROTECT *THE PUBLIC FROM SALMONELLA*

How is it possible that the poultry industry is allowed to sell products with such high rates of salmonella contamination? Why does the government fail to regulate salmonella and ensure that poultry is free from contamination, including the raw poultry that USDA itself buys for federal food assistance programs, like school lunches and food banks?

USDA knows it has a problem. Every decade, the Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People Initiative sets goals for reducing salmonella infections among Americans. However, **the salmonella targets for the past two decades were not met,** and FSIS admitted that its "current approach to *Salmonella* has not led to a demonstrable reduction in *Salmonella* infections."[31] Despite decades of policy reforms, USDA has not managed to control or regulate salmonella.

In an effort to meet the salmonella reduction targets and address the serious shortcomings in regulating salmonella, in August 2024, USDA proposed a significant step forward: a rule that would have allowed USDA to classify salmonella as an adulterant, which would give the agency the authority to recall, condemn, or stop the sale of raw poultry products contaminated with certain levels of salmonella.[32] However, in April 2025, the proposed rule was withdrawn without explanation,[33] leaving longstanding gaps in effective salmonella control unaddressed and rendering achievement of the next decade's salmonella reduction targets highly unlikely.

USDA not only fails to regulate salmonella standards, but also rewards the industry by purchasing directly from companies with high contamination ratings for nutrition assistance programs.

As a result, the poultry industry operates with impunity, selling products contaminated with salmonella and putting children and families at risk in service of efficiency and profit. USDA not only fails to regulate salmonella standards, but also rewards the industry by purchasing directly from companies with high contamination ratings for nutrition assistance programs. Significant reforms are needed to address the salmonella contamination crisis and protect individuals and families across the country.

31 USDA-FSIS, "Proposed Regulatory Framework to Reduce Salmonella Illnesses Attributable to Poultry," accessed October 1, 2025.
32 USDA-FSIS, "Salmonella Framework for Raw Poultry Products: A Proposed Rule by the Food Safety and Inspection Service," *Federal Register*, 9 CFR Part 381, August 8, 2024.
33 USDA-FSIS, "Notice of Withdrawal: Salmonella Framework for Raw Poultry Products," *Federal Register*, Vol. 90, No. 79, April 25, 2025.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief serves as a call to action to protect the nation's consumers, including the most vulnerable. Farm Forward recommends the following reforms to address the dangers posed by foodborne salmonella:

- **USDA should re-publish the August 2024 proposed "Salmonella Framework for Raw Poultry"** and declare salmonella at certain levels to be an adulterant, in effect prohibiting the sale of salmonella-contaminated products.
- **AMS should expand its zero-tolerance standards for salmonella** currently in place for boneless and ground beef, diced cooked chicken, and egg products to include raw poultry products.
- **USDA should conduct a systematic risk assessment of animal production practices** that contribute to foodborne illnesses, including salmonella, and prohibit the agricultural practices that pose the most substantial risk to human health.

These recommendations are a first step in addressing the problem of salmonella contamination in poultry products. They are the *bare minimum requirements* for protecting public health. Until these policies are enacted, salmonella will remain a persistent hazard in the American food system, with the costs borne by the public, not the producers.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: FSIS Salmonella Poultry Performance Standards Category Definitions

FSIS evaluates salmonella contamination levels against its performance standards in each poultry product type over a 52-week testing window, using a three-category rating system:[34]

- **Category 1,** the best rating, means that an establishment has been at or below half the allowed contamination level of the mandated standard.
- **Category 2** means that establishments have met the standard.
- **Category 3** is reserved for establishments that exceed the maximum allowable percentage and, thus, fail the standard.

Maximum Allowable Percentages for Salmonella Contamination[35]

Product	Performance Standard*	Maximum Allowable % Positive	Minimum # of Samples to Assess Process Control**
Comminuted Chicken	13 of 52 samples	25.0%	10
Chicken Parts	8 of 52 samples	15.4%	10
Comminuted Turkey	7 of 52 samples	13.5%	10
Broiler Carcasses	5 of 51 samples	9.8%	11
Turkey Carcasses	4 of 56 samples	7.1%	14

* The performance standard is represented as a fraction of maximum allowable positives over the target number of samples collected and analyzed in a 52-week window.

** FSIS must analyze at least this number of samples over a single 52-week window to categorize an establishment for the standard listed.

Source: USDA-FSIS, "Performance Standards: Salmonella Verification Program for Raw Poultry Products," Directive 10250.2, March 2, 2021.

34 USDA-FSIS, "Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting." Note: FSIS bases salmonella performance standard category determinations on the availability of a minimum number of salmonella sample results from a 52-week moving window.

35 Interpretation of Figure 2, which was created by USDA-FSIS, may not be intuitive. The most salient column is the third, "Maximum Allowable % Positive." For any given product type, this shows the highest percentage of salmonella-contaminated samples that will not cause the plant to fail the FSIS salmonella performance standards. The second column, "Performance Standard," refers only to plants so large that FSIS tests them for salmonella (approximately) every week of the year; a large plant with 13 of 52 samples of comminuted chicken testing positive for salmonella (25%) would receive a passing Category 2 rating. Small plants are tested far less frequently; Column 4 refers to the minimum number of tests FSIS requires over the course of a year for the smallest plants. A small plant with 2 of 10 samples of comminuted chicken testing positive for salmonella (20%) over the course of a year would receive a passing Category 2 rating.

Appendix B: AMS Commodity Procurement Process

1. AMS maintains a listing of vendors qualified to bid on contracts for different commodities
2. USDA Food and Nutrition Service, which manages federal food and nutrition assistance programs, including the National School Lunch Program and the Emergency Food Assistance Program, generates orders and coordinates with AMS on the purchase planning and scheduling
3. AMS issues purchasing announcements on an ongoing basis for over 200 different food products
4. Qualified vendors are invited to submit bids via the Web-Based Supply Chain System
5. Vendors also use the online system to modify or withdraw bids
6. AMS awards purchase contracts that are entered into the online system
7. Vendors must comply with the 1) vendor qualification checklist, 2) master solicitation for commodity procurement, and 3) applicable federal purchase program specification (FPPS)
8. Delivery of the purchased product typically occurs within 2-4 months of the award
9. Once a supplier successfully delivers the product, an invoice is submitted via the online supply chain system for AMS approval and payment

Source: USDA-AMS, "How the Process Works," accessed September 30, 2025.

Appendix C: Federal Poultry Purchases from Companies with Category 3 Rating* (2022-2024)

Company Name	Year	Type of Products in Category 3	Plants in Category 3	% of Plants in Category 3
Bachoco O.K. Foods	2022	Chicken parts	1 of 5	20%
	2023	Chicken parts	1of 5	20%
Butterball LLC	2022	Comminuted turkey	3 of 5	60%
	2023	Comminuted turkey	3 of 5	60%
	2024	Comminuted turkey	3 of 5	60%
Cargill Meat Solutions	2022	Comminuted turkey	2 of 3	67%
	2023	Comminuted turkey	2 of 3	67%
	2024	Comminuted turkey	2 of 3	67%
Foster Poultry Farms	2023	Whole chicken	2 of 6	33%
	2023	Chicken parts	2 of 6	33%
	2023	Comminuted turkey	1 of 1	100%
	2024	Whole chicken	1 of 6	17%
	2024	Chicken parts	3 of 6	50%
George's Chicken	2023	Chicken parts	1 of 5	20%
	2024	Chicken parts	1 of 5	20%
Simmons Prepared Foods	2024	Chicken parts	1 of 5	20%
Tyson Foods	2022	Whole chicken	1 of 36	3%
	2023	Whole chicken	1 of 36	3%
	2023	Chicken parts	2 of 36	6%
	2024	Chicken parts	1 of 36	3%

* According to FSIS salmonella establishment categories in January of each year.

Source: USDA-FSIS individual establishment salmonella categories for the following sample collection periods: Jan 30, 2022 through Jan 28, 2023; Jan 29, 2023 through Jan 27, 2024; Jan 28, 2024 through Jan 25, 2025, Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting | Food Safety and Inspection Service; USDA-AMS Commodity Purchases by Vendor, FY 2022, FY 2023, FY 2024: USDA-AMS, Food Commodity Purchasing, accessed October 17, 2025.

Appendix D: Individual AMS Purchases from Plants with Category 3 Ratings at Time of Purchase

Company Name	Plant Location	Purchase Award Date	Purchased Product	Product Quantity (POUNDS OR CASES)	Cost	Plant Category Rating
Bachoco O.K. Foods	Muldrow, OK	02/22/2022	Chicken breasts	624,000 lbs.	$1,802,307	3
Bachoco O.K. Foods	Muldrow, OK	05/20/2022	Chicken breasts	663,000 lbs.	$2,331,147	3
Bachoco O.K. Foods	Muldrow, OK	09/02/2022	Chicken breasts	897,000 lbs.	$3,035,182	3
Bachoco O.K. Foods	Muldrow, OK	12/06/2022	Chicken breasts	20,800 cs	$2,145,923	3
Bachoco O.K. Foods	Muldrow, OK	03/07/2023	Chicken breasts	15,600 cs	$1,587,521	3
Bachoco O.K. Foods	Muldrow, OK	05/12/2023	Chicken breasts	5,200 cs	$544,934	3
Bachoco O.K. Foods	Muldrow, OK	08/24/2023	Chicken breasts	32,600 cs	$3,315,628	3
Foster Poultry Farms	Fresno, CA	08/29/2024	Chicken parts	45,6000 cs	$1,256,834	3
Foster Poultry Farms	Livingston, CA	02/23/2024	Chicken parts	950,000 cs	$28,400	3
House of Raeford	Teachey, NC	07/29/2025	Whole chicken carcasses	108,000 lbs.	$172,778	3
Pilgrim's Pride	Mt. Pleasant, TX	07/29/2025	Chicken parts	2,916,000 lbs.	$2,345,760	2
Tyson	New Holland, PA	07/29/2025	Whole chicken carcasses	10,800,000 lbs	$17,100,720	2

AUTHOR & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Farm Forward was founded in 2007 as the nation's first nonprofit devoted exclusively to end-factory farming. We are a team of strategists, campaigners, and thought leaders guiding the movement to change the way our world eats and farms. More information about Farm Forward's work and our other publications can be found at farmforward.com.

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