

# Human Foods Program 2026 Priority Deliverables

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## Introduction

In 2026, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) intends to make significant strides to protect and promote the health and well-being of all Americans. FDA's Human Foods Program (HFP) plays a critical role in implementing the Trump Administration and HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s goal of Making America Healthy Again (MAHA). For the first time, there is a dramatic and determined focus across the Federal government to recognize the importance of food and nutrition in improving the health of all Americans.

The FDA is responsible for regulating about 80% of the U.S. food supply, with HFP overseeing all activities related to food safety and nutrition. HFP's **vision** is to ensure that food serves as a vehicle for wellness, and our day-to-day activities support our **mission** to protect and promote the health and wellness of the American public through science-based approaches to prevent foodborne illness, reduce diet-related chronic disease, and ensure chemicals in food are safe.

In 2026, FDA will continue to implement multi-year initiatives that advance HFP's vision and mission. Those plans will build upon a considerable body of success that has already been achieved during 2025, such as beginning processes to:

- Remove petroleum-based dyes from Americans' food, and introduce new food dyes, including those from natural sources, to replace them;
- Rigorously review, and, if appropriate, ban, a range of food additives about which safety concerns have been raised;
- Reform current regulations to more effectively regulate the safety of food substances and increase transparency about substances in the U.S. food supply;
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the nutrient requirements for infant formula for the first time in decades (part of Operation Stork Speed);

- Create a Front of Package nutrition labeling program that will help consumers quickly and easily identify healthier dietary choices;
- Expand the inspection of food processing facilities by leveraging state inspection resources to complement FDA inspections;
- Reduce child exposure to contaminants in food, such as lead and cadmium;
- Address growing concerns around ultra-processed foods (UPFs) given their association with numerous chronic diseases; and
- Increase transparency in FDA's regulatory decisions and enforcement activities.

HFP developed this document to highlight the goals we will work to prioritize in 2026, which include delivering on the Secretary's MAHA agenda, to make the U.S. food supply safer and its population healthier.

### **Human Foods Program: Designed with Public Health and Organizational Effectiveness in Mind**

HFP is organized to facilitate a consistent, systematic, and intentional risk management approach (<https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/human-foods-program/overview-human-foods-program-hfp-operating-model>) to our regulatory responsibilities. To meet our public health mission and vision more effectively and efficiently, we centralized our risk management activities into three main areas:

- **Food Chemical Safety:** Ensuring that exposure to chemicals, including both additives and contaminants, that occur in foods is safe, as well as advancing dietary supplement safety, and supporting and effectively regulating food ingredient innovation.
- **Nutrition:** Elevating and empowering action on nutrition science, policy, and initiatives to help reduce the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases, driving consumer awareness and education, and ensuring the nutritional adequacy and safety of infant formula.
- **Microbiological Food Safety:** Advancing strategies to prevent pathogen-related foodborne illness in close collaboration with other regulatory agencies, states, industry, and other stakeholders.

Organizing our work in these areas helps HFP ensure a consistent approach and coordinated effort, allowing FDA to better leverage limited resources, and more efficiently and effectively deliver risk management actions by HFP and the Office of Inspections & Investigations (OII).

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# 2026 Priority Deliverables

To build upon last year's significant progress, HFP will implement an ambitious agenda within the program's three focus areas.

## Food Chemical Safety

Protecting the food supply from unsafe chemicals and additives is a key part of the Administration's Make Our Children Healthy Again Strategy (<https://chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/The-MAHA-Strategy-WH.pdf>) [↗](http://www.fda.gov/about-fda/website-policies/website-disclaimer) (<http://www.fda.gov/about-fda/website-policies/website-disclaimer>) (the MAHA Strategy). The 2025 initiatives in this area will be greatly expanded in 2026 by advancing these key deliverables:

- **GRAS Reform:** FDA will make the biggest update to strengthen its food-additive oversight by addressing how 'Generally Recognized as Safe' (GRAS) substances are handled. Under the current voluntary GRAS notification program, companies can introduce a human or animal food substance purported to be GRAS under the conditions of its intended use without FDA notice or review. In 2026, FDA will publish a proposed regulation to require the submission to FDA of GRAS notices for all new substances claimed to be GRAS.
- **Post-market Safety Reviews of Marketed Food Chemicals:** In 2026, HFP will continue reassessments of chemicals used in food, starting with safety reviews of those that are most concerning to consumers, e.g., phthalates, propylparaben, butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA), and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), among others. The first edition of the Systematic Post-Market Assessment process will be posted to communicate how HFP evaluates the safety of substances, how the public can participate, and how HFP decides which substances to review. HFP will also build out the review staff and leadership for HFP's Office of Post-Market Assessment in 2026.
- **Microplastics:** To respond to increasing scientific data and public concern about the risks of microplastics in the food supply, in 2026 HFP will carry-out research to identify methods that accurately and reproducibly detect, quantify, and characterize microplastics in human food. This will enable FDA to identify when such contaminants are present in food and to take necessary regulatory action to address any risk to human health.
- **Closer to Zero:** Contaminants such as arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury exist in the environment and thus can get into the food supply. The Closer to Zero initiative targets reduction of these contaminants in food for infants and young children. HFP will advance this work in 2026 through activities to establish action levels for cadmium and inorganic

arsenic in baby and toddler foods. HFP will also issue guidance on preventive controls to minimize chemical hazards in all foods, and support surveillance for chemical contaminants.

- **Adoption of Natural Color Additives:** FDA is prioritizing a shift from petroleum-based food dyes to natural alternatives. As petroleum-based food dyes are phased out, HFP will focus on expediting review of new natural alternatives and continue guiding industry on their development. In 2026, HFP will publish draft guidance on when fruit- and vegetable-derived juices qualify as color additives under FDA regulations. HFP will also complete reviews of additional natural colors and prioritize evaluation of any new natural color submissions.
- **Consumer Exposure to Contaminants in Food:** In 2026, HFP will continue to study exposure to certain heavy metals, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and other contaminants in food. HFP will also conduct the next Food Safety and Nutrition Survey to learn how much consumers know and understand about food safety and nutrition topics in order to better inform future policy and public health initiatives.
- **Regulation of New Dietary Ingredients:** HFP will release final guidance to better inform industry on the safety and identity information required for new dietary ingredient (NDI) notifications during 2026. Manufacturers or distributors of an NDI that has not been present in the food supply as an article used for food must submit a premarket safety notification to FDA before introducing the product into the market. HFP will also explore stakeholder communications to inform consumers and engage industry regarding our efforts to enhance NDI regulation. In addition, because the dietary supplement industry continues to grow, HFP will also be developing methods for streamlining FDA review of NDI notifications to assure compliance with the statutory 75-day review timeline.
- **Dietary Supplement Oversight Modernization:** Given the rapid growth of the dietary supplement marketplace and the more than 30 years since enactment of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA), HFP will evaluate new and modernized regulatory approaches that protect the public health while supporting a responsible dietary supplement industry. HFP will continue to support dietary supplement priorities with targeted enforcement strategies on violative products.
- **Guidelines for Caffeine Labeling:** With the growing consumption of caffeinated beverages and foods, HFP will highlight industry best practices for labeling added caffeine content in foods in connection with both packaged foods and beverages and at retail and restaurant settings.
- **Allergen Labeling:** FDA will hold multiple opportunities to hear from the public and scientific community in order to advance our approach to regulating food allergens to

benefit public health. FDA will take steps to develop recommendations about requiring transparency in disclosures of ingredients that impact certain health conditions, such as gluten for those with Celiac disease, and other established food allergens.

## Reducing Chronic Disease Through Better Nutrition

The MAHA Strategy relies heavily upon FDA's nutrition program to help Americans build better diets and reduce the toll of diet-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and certain cancers. The following 2026 deliverables are expected to significantly advance that strategy:

- **Ultra-processed Foods:** FDA is focused on identifying and reducing risks arising from the high consumption rates of ultra-processed foods (UPFs). In 2026, building on efforts that began in 2025 with a Request for Information (RFI), HFP will continue to collaborate with USDA and other federal government partners on gathering information, data and research, and analyzing comments to the 2025 RFI to develop a federal government definition of UPFs.
- **Infant Formula Safety (Operation Stork Speed):** Operation Stork Speed, launched in March 2025, is an FDA and HHS initiative to expand options for safe, reliable, and nutritious infant formula for American families. During 2026, HFP will begin implementation of a plan for modernizing infant formula nutrient requirements based on analysis of scientific evidence, expert input, and extensive public recommendations received. HFP will also release exposure data on a range of heavy metals and other contaminants, such as lead, arsenic, cadmium, mercury, and PFAS.
- **NIH-FDA Nutrition Regulatory Science Program:** Building on the announcement of the program in 2025, in 2026 HFP and NIH will advance key research to guide food and nutrition policies that aim to improve Americans' diets and overall health. Specifically, experts will design a research agenda and begin studies to better understand such questions as how and why UPFs harm people's health, how certain food additives might affect metabolic health, and the role of maternal and infant dietary exposures on subsequent health outcomes.
- **Front-of-Package (FOP) Nutrition Labeling:** In early 2025, FDA proposed a regulation requiring food packages to display key information—like added sugar and sodium levels—on the front of the package to help consumers make better informed choices. FDA received tens of thousands of public comments on the proposal, eliciting widespread support for FOP labeling, but also providing varying opinions on the details of the label's content and design. In 2026, HFP will assimilate and summarize the public comments and prepare options for leadership to make decisions on the content of a final regulation. This

important initiative is expected to empower consumers to identify how foods can fit into a healthy diet and could result in manufacturers reformulating products to make them healthier.

- **“Healthy” Claim Implementation:** In 2025, FDA finalized a rule allowing foods that meet certain standards—such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and foods low in added sugar and sodium—to voluntarily use the label term “healthy.” The regulation will help consumers build healthier diets and could help encourage manufacturers to produce foods that meet the “healthy” criteria. In 2026, HFP will assess whether changes to the “healthy” claim are necessary to align with the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and continue work to implement the updated criteria, including by advancing a potential guidance that identifies a symbol to depict the “healthy” claim.
- **Food Standards of Identity:** Due to advances in food science, agriculture, and production practices, FDA has started the process to revoke 52 now obsolete food standards of identity. During 2026, HFP will complete an interim final rule, two new final rules, and publish new proposed rules to continue to eliminate outdated standards of identity.
- **Added Sugar Reduction:** To address concerns that overconsumption of added sugar in foods and beverages significantly contributes to diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, HFP will create an added sugar reduction strategy in 2026. The strategy will focus on encouraging the food industry to lower added sugar in processed and prepared foods, proposing a nutrient content claim for added sugars (defining “low added sugar”), exploring targeted consumer education initiatives in collaboration with other federal agencies, investigating ingredient labeling and menu labeling requirements, exploring potential strategies for labeling of sugar alternatives that do not increase blood glucose, and assessing the use of low or no-calorie and non-nutritive alternative sweeteners.
- **Sodium Reduction:** Reducing sodium intake has the potential for preventing hundreds of thousands of premature deaths in the coming years. To address the excess sodium in American diets, which is principally derived from sodium in processed foods and foods consumed outside the home, FDA created a multi-year voluntary sodium reduction initiative that encourages industry to gradually reduce the sodium content of their products across the food supply. Following the issuance of FDA’s Phase I voluntary targets in 2021, Americans’ sodium intake has decreased by about 10%. In 2026, HFP will issue a formal evaluation of the Phase I targets.
- **Food Labeling for Online Grocery Shopping:** Online grocery shopping has increased dramatically in recent years and now represents more than 20% of grocery sales nationwide; however, certain food label information – e.g., the Nutrition Facts label,

ingredients, and allergen information – can be missing or hard to find. To increase transparency and to assist consumers, FDA plans to issue a draft guidance on food labeling for online grocery shopping in 2026.

- **Guidelines on Direct Marketing of Certain Foods to Children:** FDA will work with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to explore the development of potential industry guidelines and other strategies to help limit the direct marketing of certain unhealthy foods to children, as outlined in the MAHA Strategy.

## Microbiological Food Safety

While ensuring the safety of the foods they produce is the responsibility of industry, FDA oversees these efforts and strives to ensure that foodborne illness is prevented in the first place. In 2026, HFP will further that goal by prioritizing the following key deliverables:

- **Food Inspection Coverage by Leveraging State Capacity:** HFP will begin the effort to create Better Regulatory Inspections for Dynamic Government Efficiency (BRIDGE), by relying on state partners to carry out more routine food safety systems inspections, while still maintaining FDA's rigorous national standards. This allows FDA to focus its resources toward international, and high-risk, complex, and targeted inspection activities. This modernized inspection approach will enhance public health protections by increasing industry coverage and maximizing the return on investment of federal and state resources. With FDA-provided support, a “proof of process” will begin in 2026 with full implementation occurring over the following four years.
- **National Regulatory and Laboratory Training System:** As HFP strengthens state partnerships, consistent training standards are critical for all Integrated Food Safety System (IFSS) regulatory and laboratory professionals. FDA and IFSS partners will build a sustainable training system by leveraging expertise and resources from all partners—including FDA; other federal agencies; state, local, tribal, and territorial regulatory and laboratory partners; associations; academia; private training companies; and industry—to share responsibility for designing and delivering training. The National Regulatory and Laboratory Training System will improve training and coordination at all levels across the IFSS. In 2026, HFP will establish the National Coordination Center to implement consistent training standards and accessible learning for federal and state regulatory and laboratory staff.
- **Oversight and Safety of Imported Food:** In 2026, FDA will use innovative regulatory approaches, improved data and analytics, and allocation of oversight resources to enhance the ability to identify and act on violative products and ensure food imported from abroad meets the same food safety standards as food produced domestically. FDA will

fully utilize authorities such as Import Certification and Foreign Supplier Verification Program requirements, enhance import screening based on expanded data sources and quantitative analytical techniques (AI/ML), and leverage foreign competent authorities charged with the safety of food offered for import into the United States. By more effectively working with state partners on domestic oversight, FDA will expand allocation of inspectional, laboratory and other oversight resources to the foreign arena. The Food Safety Partnership with Mexico, regulatory partnership arrangements, and Systems Recognition initiatives will be a focus in 2026.

- **Imported Seafood Safety:** Imported seafood is a commodity that requires particular attention as the proportion imported to meet the demand of American consumers is high. During 2026, FDA will ensure the safety of imported shrimp through several mechanisms: 1) advancing Regulatory Partnership Arrangements with the leading shrimp-exporting countries (India and Ecuador) that consider the risks and regulatory systems of each country, 2) continuing emphasis on sampling for surveillance and compliance for shrimp supply chains, and 3) establishing whole genome sequencing capabilities and data sharing for the shrimp supply. HFP will also complete development of a seafood fraud identification program. FDA will also continue to seek additional authority from Congress to require the destruction of imported seafood and other imported FDA-regulated products that pose a significant public health risk, as outlined in FDA's 2026 Legislative Proposals (<https://www.fda.gov/media/187068/download?attachment>).
- **Fresh and Processed Produce Safety:** Produce, an essential component of a whole-foods healthy diet, is especially susceptible to foodborne illness because it is often minimally processed. During 2026, HFP will take numerous steps across the produce arena to further improve the safety of fruits and vegetables. Example activities include: advancing additional training for growers on the agricultural water requirements through the Produce Safety Alliance; a new training regimen for sprout producers based on the updated FDA sprout guidance documents; a joint FDA-Purdue University study of *Salmonella* in cantaloupes, and new cantaloupe safety guidelines; a pilot project on leafy greens data sharing with the Western Growers Association; a cucumber safety initiative in Florida; partnership efforts with Mexico to ensure safety of produce imports from that country; and various studies of potential hazards in produce.
- **Dairy and Egg Safety:** Foodborne disease illness outbreaks associated with eggs and dairy products are often traced back to inadequate sanitation practices. In 2026, HFP will promote contamination prevention through enhanced training and education for dairy and egg producers. These will include a high-risk dairy training course for state regulators, examinations of cheese aging practices, new outreach efforts for small ice cream

producers, establishment of a comprehensive “library” of safety-related resources for queso cheese manufacturers, and new education and outreach efforts for small egg producers. This will help protect consumers and ensure their access to essential components of a whole-foods diet.

- **Recall Process Modernization:** FDA will build upon progress made in 2025 to improve the reach and clarity of our recall communications. In 2026, FDA will incorporate feedback from interactions with stakeholders on risk communication strategies to enhance public access to critical recall information and continue to improve the speed of recall classification through process improvements. By identifying and employing strategies to improve recall messaging for consumers, working with regulatory partners to expedite sharing of commercial and confidential information during a recall, and ensuring that harmful products are removed from the market more quickly and effectively, FDA will improve the speed and transparency of the recall process for both industry and consumers alike.
- **Food Traceability:** FDA will engage quarterly with stakeholders, and educate covered entities (including farms, restaurants, retail establishments, and warehouses distributing to retail food establishments and restaurants) to ensure that such entities can comply with the Food Traceability Rule by the compliance date. Additionally, HFP will facilitate a tabletop exercise (involving producers, processors, distributors, retailers, and technology partners) to test traceability readiness and will educate stakeholders, including small retailers and restaurants by, among other activities, providing explanatory Q&As to help industry implement traceability measures. Implementation of the Food Traceability Rule will enable FDA and industry to identify and remove contaminated food from the marketplace more quickly.
- **Food Code and Retail Program Standards:** The FDA will release an updated Food Code in 2026, providing all levels of government with a scientifically sound technical and legal basis for regulating the retail and food service industries. Local, state, territorial, and tribal regulators use the FDA Food Code as a model to update their own food safety rules and to provide national consistency in food regulatory policy. The forthcoming Food Code update will reflect the latest updates to retail food science, best practices, and current data on retail foodborne outbreaks. In 2026, HFP will also develop a companion Retail Program Standards manual, which is considered the standard in retail food safety program management to help state, local, territorial, and tribal agencies improve their food safety programs.
- **Tech-enabled Advances in Risk Management:** In 2026, HFP will develop a plan for using AI-predictive models to utilize and analyze large datasets generated by the food

supply chain across industry sectors such as growth, harvest, transportation, manufacturing, and distribution. In addition, HFP will examine the application of reliable, external third-party audit data with the objective of optimizing FDA resources in an effective and efficient manner. In 2026, HFP will conduct a proof of concept to demonstrate the capability of improving the accuracy of the facility inventory utilizing publicly available data. As a result, HFP expects a tremendous increase in the information and quality of data available to establish sound risk management strategies.

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