

## Budgeting Food Safety

LINDSEY COBLENTZ, Associate Editor, Food Manufacturing

By LINDSEY COBLENTZ, Associate Editor, *Food Manufacturing*



President Obama released his 2013 budget proposal in February, allotting [\\$2.5 billion](#) [1] for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), about the same amount Congress granted the agency in 2012.

Shortly after the President's proposed budget was released, the FDA requested a budget of [\\$4.5 billion](#) [2] for fiscal year 2013, announcing plans to introduce new user fees to cover 98 percent of the budget increase. User fees aren't new to the agency, but in the past, pharmaceutical companies have paid the majority of such charges. The 2013 FDA budget proposes to bring the food industry into the mix with two new fees the agency says would generate \$225 million.

These user fees have, for the most part, been hotly contested by the industry. Even before the FDA released its 2013 budget proposal, food companies began making known their views on the topic. A coalition of 30 food organizations, covering all facets of the industry, voiced their opposition to the fees in a [letter](#) [3] to Jeffrey Zients, acting director of the Office of Management and Budget, and Kathleen Sibelius, secretary of U.S. Health and Human Services, the department that houses the FDA.

One of the major industry concerns is that consumers would be forced to foot the bill if such fees were implemented. The letter states: "As consumers continue to cope with a period of prolonged economic turbulence and food makers struggle with record-high commodity prices, the creation of new food taxes or regulatory fees would mean higher costs for food makers and lead to higher food prices for consumers."

The FDA's budget crunch comes at a crucial time as the agency continues to enact portions of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). Many of the provisions of the

## Budgeting Food Safety

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

---

act are self-implementing, meaning they will go into effect whether or not the FDA receives the government funding it needs. Some [legal experts](#) [4] indicate that this could create problems for food companies, most notably being that the agency may have to resort to enforcing some laws without providing thorough guidance to the industry.

President Obama's proposed budget also rids the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) of its [microbiological data program](#) [5], the country's only program that routinely tests produce for dangerous pathogens.

The program currently tests fruits and vegetables for bacteria, such as E. coli, salmonella and listeria, which could result in foodborne illnesses. Samples that test positive result in the food recalls that help protect consumers' public health, as well as food manufacturers' reputations.

Produce associations, such as United Fresh Produce, supported the decision to cut the program, saying the private sector should be responsible for product safety testing. Interestingly, the USDA also approved. A USDA spokeswoman said, "While food safety is a vitally important part of successfully marketing produce and other agricultural products, other federal and state public health agencies are better equipped to perform this function."

Two of the agencies suggested for the job include the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), though neither have said they plan to create such a program. With the FDA already strapped for cash, it is unlikely the agency could afford such an undertaking. A CDC spokeswoman simply stated, "[Testing produce for pathogens] just [is] not part of our mission."

As government agency budgets continue to be stretched, it is clear that the food industry will have to step up its own efforts to improve food safety. Processors should carefully research the new requirements of the FSMA, as portions of the act will continue to roll out over the next few years. And as private food safety services become a more integral part of plant operations, companies will need to look closely at their options in order to select the best equipment and services for their food safety plans.

*What do you think about the FDA's proposed budget and user fees? Should regulatory agencies be responsible for the nation's food safety, or should food companies play a more important role in that undertaking? Let me know at [lindsey.coblentz@advantagemedia.com](mailto:lindsey.coblentz@advantagemedia.com) [6] or feel free to comment below!*

**Source URL (retrieved on 04/25/2015 - 8:33am):**

<http://www.chem.info/blogs/2012/03/budgeting-food-safety>

### Links:

[1] [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/44/post/fda-budget-stays-about-the-same-at-25-billion/2012/02/13/gIQA0tABBR\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/44/post/fda-budget-stays-about-the-same-at-25-billion/2012/02/13/gIQA0tABBR_blog.html)

## **Budgeting Food Safety**

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

---

[2] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2012/02/fda-requests-45-billion-support-food-safety-public-health>

[3] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2012/01/food-groups-fda-should-be-funded-without-new-taxes>

[4] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/articles/2011/07/q-new-reality-regulatory-changes-and-food-industry>

[5] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2012/02/obamas-budget-cuts-pathogen-testing-produce>

[6] <mailto:lindsey.coblentz@advantagemedia.com>