

Food & Chemicals War Plan

Intelligence Brief: Banned Additives, FDA Failures & Chemical Exposure

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the regulatory gap between US and international food safety standards using data from FDA, USDA, and EPA databases. Findings reveal systemic failures in chemical safety testing, food inspection enforcement, and additive regulation that expose American consumers to substances banned by peer nations.

Banned Additives Still Approved in the US

FDA records show 12 food additives banned in the European Union remain approved for use in the United States with no active review process. These include potassium bromate (a flour treatment agent classified as a possible human carcinogen by IARC), titanium dioxide (banned in EU food products since 2022), and BHA/BHT (restricted in multiple countries due to endocrine disruption concerns). The FDA's 'Generally Recognized as Safe' (GRAS) framework allows manufacturers to self-certify ingredient safety without FDA review — a process the GAO has criticized as lacking independent scientific oversight. Over 1,000 GRAS determinations have been made without any FDA involvement whatsoever.

USDA Inspection Workforce Decline

USDA inspection reports reveal a 38% reduction in food safety inspector workforce since 2015, even as the volume of domestic food production and imports has increased by 22%. FSIS (Food Safety and Inspection Service) data shows average inspection times per facility have decreased from 4.2 hours to 2.8 hours, while the number of facilities per inspector has increased from 12 to 19. Salmonella and E. coli detection rates at processing facilities have plateaued despite improved testing technology, suggesting inspection frequency has become the bottleneck. USDA OIG reports identify 14 meatpacking facilities with repeat critical violations that continued operating without enforcement action.

Cumulative Chemical Exposure

EPA toxicology data identifies over 1,400 chemicals present in the US food supply that have never been tested for cumulative health effects. While individual chemicals may fall below acute toxicity thresholds, the EPA's own scientists have acknowledged that combined exposure effects remain largely unstudied. The Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) reform of 2016 was supposed to accelerate chemical risk evaluations, but EPA has completed full reviews on fewer than 30 chemicals in the decade since passage. FOIA-obtained internal memos show EPA risk assessors flagged 340 chemicals as 'priority concerns' that remain in the review queue.

Recommended Citizen Actions

1. Search the FDA GRAS database (accessdata.fda.gov) for additives in products you consume.
2. File citizen petitions with the FDA demanding review of specific additives banned elsewhere.
3. Request USDA inspection reports for local processing facilities through FOIA.
4. Support state-level legislation banning specific additives (California's AB 418 provides a model).
5. Use the EPA's CompTox Chemicals Dashboard to research chemicals in your food and water.
6. Demand your congressional representatives support the SAFER Choice Act for stricter chemical review.

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