What is *E. coli* O157:H7?	*E. coli* O157:H7 is one of hundreds of strains of the bacterium *Escherichia coli*. Although most strains of this bacterium are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals, this particular strain produces a powerful toxin and can cause illness. The combination of letters and numbers in the name of the bacterium refers to specific genetic markers found on its surface, which distinguishes it from other types of *E. coli*. Eating food that has not been cooked sufficiently to kill bacteria such as *E. coli* O157:H7 can cause severe illness in humans.
***E. coli* O157:H7 Incidence**	The incidence of *E. coli* O157:H7 has been on a downward trend. • According to Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) sampling data, the incidence of *E. coli* O157:H7 in ground beef declined more than 70 percent between 2000 and 2006. • Preliminary data suggest the reported incidence of *E. coli* may increase for 2007. • History, and significant research into the characteristics of this pathogen, show it is more prevalent and challenging to control during the summer months. • There is still much to be learned about *E. coli* O157:H7, and ongoing research is focusing on maintaining and improving the industry's effectiveness in fighting this pathogen.
Commitment to Advancing Safety	Today, the cooperative efforts of all partners in the beef supply chain are continuing to research and develop interventions to implement as a part of a comprehensive safety system from production to consumer. This system has proven effective against *E. coli* O157:H7. • Beef producers alone have invested more than $25 million since 1993 in beef safety research, leading to best practices that help reduce *E. coli* O157:H7. • Partners throughout the beef production chain collectively invest approximately $350 million every year in testing product, implementing interventions and conducting research that help ensure beef safety.
Standing on the Best Practices	Individuals representing each segment of the beef production chain meet yearly to review and update the Beef Industry Food Safety Council (BIFSCo) Best Practices, which serve as a roadmap for reducing *E. coli* O157:H7. • Individuals and companies involved in this process recognize that safety is a must, and therefore, a non-competitive issue. • These Best Practices are ever-changing documents that are updated and reviewed as scientific and technological advances are made. These resources are available free of charge at www.bifsco.org. • 100% implementation of these Best Practices throughout the production chain is critically important, and BIFSCo members are working tirelessly toward that goal.
Tips for Preventing Foodborne Illnesses	Consumers can take important steps in the kitchen to ensure their food is safe: • Always wash hands, cutting boards, utensils and countertops with hot, soapy water before and after handling meat. • Don't cross-contaminate — separate raw meat and poultry from other foods and don't place cooked food on a plate that previously contained raw meat or poultry. • Safely thaw frozen meat and poultry in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave as part of cooking. Never thaw at room temperature. • Use an instant-read meat thermometer to ensure the proper internal temperature and eliminate any harmful bacteria. Remember frozen meat and poultry may take extra cooking time to reach the correct internal temperature. • Refrigerate leftovers in shallow containers promptly after eating.
	Recommended Cooking Temperatures Poultry 165°F Ground Beef 160°F Beef Roasts and Steaks 145°F Seafood 145°F
Food Safety Questions	**USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline:** For food safety answers on topics including safe storage and handling of food, safe preparation, product dating, product content and more. The hotline is open from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time on weekdays year round. **Call toll-free:** 888-MPHotline (888-674-6854) **Email:** mphotline.fsis@usda.gov **Online:** http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Home/index.asp

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For more info, contact the National Cattlemen's Beef Association at info@BeefFromPastureToPlate.org

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