

“We have the technology and understanding to improve the health and safety of America’s meat, poultry, fruits, vegetables, and other foods. It is high time we do it.”

Herb Kohl

Healthy and Safe Food

On March 24, 2009, Senator Herb Kohl sent a letter to President Barack Obama thanking him for forming an interagency working group that would be focused on overhauling the nation’s food safety system. In the letter, Kohl detailed his long and tough fight to improve the health and safety of the food that American families eat. He wrote: “Only through very open and honest communication can we make sure that our foods and drugs are safe.”

He continued to lay out the challenges he faced during his time in office fighting to improve food quality and safety at the oversight hearings and briefings that he held both in Washington and Wisconsin to combat these challenges. He discussed the funds that he was able to secure for food safety agencies’ budgets – increases in funding that were the largest in the Food and Drug Administration’s history. Yet, he said, “I do not believe that money alone will meet the challenges ahead.” Kohl lived up to his convictions, never simply throwing money at a problem; rather he took his commitment to the health and safety of the American public seriously and thoughtfully.

America’s children will grow up in a better place thanks to his advocacy on behalf of...a strengthened food safety system.

**President Barack Obama on the Retirement of Senator Herb Kohl
May 13, 2011**

Since coming into office Kohl made the quality of food Americans consumed a priority. His ability to make a significant dent was bolstered by his position as ranking member and later as chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee.

His crowning achievement was playing a significant role in enacting the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2010. The bill, signed into law by the president on January 4, 2011, represented the first major reform of the United States food system in more than 70 years.

Safe Food

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are 48 million new cases of food-related illnesses in the United States each year, and they affect roughly one out of every six Americans. Many of these illnesses are preventable and rattle consumer confidence in the quality and safety of the food they eat. Between 1998 and 2004, food poisoning outbreaks caused by produce doubled.

Kohl knew that the federal government needed to address this. "There is nothing more basic and necessary than protecting the food supply. Without congressional action, it will only be a matter of time before we have a major food safety scare on our hands," he warned.

U.S. Senator Herb Kohl is stepping up as a champion of food safety, and even President Bush's appointees are being forced to take notice...It is easy to dismiss hearings as nothing more than talk. But when they are organized and chaired by a senator who is serious about making something happen and who has the power of the purse in his hands, even a field hearing can be of significant consequence.

Capital Times, January 17, 2007

In 2005, Kohl and then Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) sponsored a bill to toughen food safety laws and protect consumers. It was nicknamed Kevin's Law for 2 ½ year old Kevin Kowalcyk of Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, who died from an E. Coli infection. The bill included provisions that allowed the USDA to determine the foodborne pathogens that represented the largest threat to the public's health and set standards to reduce the presence of those pathogens in our food products.

Even though the 111th Congress was plagued with partisan politics, Herb Kohl pushed ahead, searching for a deal. Caroline Smith DeWaal, the Director of Food Safety at the Center for Science in the Public Interest wrote of that time that “amid the rancorous partisanship that has marked the past year in the nation’s capital, a bipartisan effort to pass food safety legislation has been taking shape.”

On November 30, 2010, that effort culminated, and the Senate passed the Food Safety Modernization Act by a vote of 73-25.

The bill included a provision backed by Kohl that allows the FDA to prevent food from importation if it comes from a foreign facility that does not allow American inspectors to enter the facility within 48 hours of a request to do so.

“For years we have been working to strengthen the FDA’s work, enabling them to hire more inspectors, provide greater scrutiny of imports and bolstering research. But as much as we worked to fortify the FDA’s arsenal, our antiquated food safety laws simply didn’t reflect a world in which many food products travel halfway around the world before ending up on our grocery shelves. This bill will help keep our food supply more secure and reduce the risk of food-borne illness for consumers,” Kohl said.

“It’s an unusual and shining example of how bipartisanship can work in Congress,” said Erik Olson, director of the Pew Health Group food programs, which spearheaded a coalition of consumer groups that supported the legislation.

What did the Food Safety Modernization Act do?

- Give FDA mandatory recall authority for the first time
- Establish science-based minimum safety standards for fruit and vegetable production
- Require imported food to meet identical safety measures as domestically produced food
- Increase foreign food production facility inspections
- Determine inspection frequency of food processing facilities based on risk of product for contamination
- Mandate food processors to predict where contaminations may occur and work to prevent it

“That’s Senator Kohl for you,” explained Phil Karsting, Kohl’s chief of staff, “He always works across the aisle, because he knows that, if it’s good for the country, then surely it can be accomplished in a bipartisan way.”

School staff believed that the pilot helped lessen the risk of obesity, increased attention in class, reduced consumption of less healthy food, and reduced the number of unhealthy snacks brought from home. In addition, the school staff found that the pilot increased students' awareness and preference for a variety of fruits and vegetables (particularly less familiar kinds, such as kiwis and fresh pears), helped children who would otherwise be hungry get more food, and increased students' consumption of fruit and vegetables at lunch.

“Sen. Kohl Announces Expansion of Fresh Fruit, Vegetable Programs to Help Wisconsin’s Children,” US Fed News September 22, 2005

Kohl reflects: “If we expect our food safety agencies to monitor the billions of dollars of domestic and imported food that moves rapidly throughout our country, from field to table, we must equip them with the resources necessary to do the job. I’m pleased that with many worthy interests competing for our scarce federal dollars, we made food safety a priority.”

Healthy Food

Just as Kohl was a stalwart supporter of a safe food supply, he was also staunchly behind expanded access to a healthy food supply. Throughout his career he promoted initiatives that expanded nutrition programs to young, low-income, and elderly populations.

One of these initiatives was the summer feeding pilot program, which ensured that low-income students who participated in the school lunch program received a nutritious weekday meal during the summer months. Kohl said of the Summer Food Service Program: “These bipartisan programs are important to the well-being of our low-income and

rural children, and should never be candidates for the chopping block.”

Kohl also proudly championed bringing the School Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program to many states including Wisconsin. The initiative made fresh fruit and vegetables available free of charge to students in eligible schools. “By expanding this program,” he said, “Wisconsin’s children will have a chance to learn healthy eating habits that will benefit them their whole lives.”

Perhaps one of Senator Kohl's most influential projects to expand access to healthy food was the extension of WIC benefits to include farmers markets. It connects WIC recipients to community farmers markets to encourage consumption of fruits and vegetables by pregnant mothers and young children. It benefits both the recipients of the coupons, who are able to purchase local, healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as the local farmers who receive their business.

Kohl said of his efforts, "With funding for agriculture programs increasingly scarce, it's important that our priorities are those initiatives that are both effective and practical. The Farmers Market Nutrition Program cultivates a common sense, mutually – beneficial connection – it helps our farmers sell their produce and it helps mothers have and raise healthy babies. I am pleased to report that Wisconsin has had a successful experience with the program and am glad that we can expand our efforts."

Observing the overwhelmingly successful results of the WIC program in Wisconsin, Kohl championed a further expansion for senior citizens, promoting the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides coupons for low-income seniors to be used at local markets throughout the country. He made sure this program was funded even in years when the president proposed to cut it altogether.

Of particular significance to Kohl was the Agriculture Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998 that increased eligibility for the Food Stamp program to legal immigrants who had recently been cut out of the program: among them, 7,000 members of the Hmong and Lao communities who live in Wisconsin. "My support for the Food Stamps restoration is significantly heart-felt due to my concern for the Hmong and other legal immigrants from Laos and their families. They fought alongside our American men and women in the Vietnam War, risking their lives on behalf of all that we hold dear in this country. They fled to the U.S. out of fear of persecution, and to them we truly owe a debt of gratitude," remarked Kohl.

Banning elderly, disabled and other needy legal immigrants from Food Stamps was harsh and unfair. I'm pleased that the Senate did the right and responsible thing by reversing that ban.

- Senator Herb Kohl

Sustainable Food

Kohl's mission was not only to produce healthier and more natural food, but also to do so in a manner that would preserve Wisconsin's landscape and natural beauty.

Beginning early in his tenure, Kohl promoted research into agricultural systems that are environmentally sound and economically feasible. Some research focused on grassroots experimentation with ways to increase profitability of farms by reducing dependence on off-farm inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers. He also worked to secure funding for programs that train the extension agents share information about cutting-edge, environmentally-sound farming practices to farmers.

"My vision of the organic industry has always been one of the smaller, family-operated producers selling their produce directly to consumers. We need a system for certifying farmers that allows any producer who wants to grow organically to be able to do it," says Kohl.

In 1990, Kohl promoted the production of organically made foods through the

Senator Kohl has been a dedicated supporter of organic and sustainable agriculture for more than two decades. For years a leader on the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, he has supported sustainable and organic research, including the innovative Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and funding for the Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) program. Knowing that protecting our nation's land and water for future generations, Senator Kohl has championed conservation programs like the Conservation Stewardship Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and programs that promote managed grazing practices. Recognizing that healthy rural communities depend on profitable farmers, he has supported funding for innovative marketing and value-added grant programs, cost-share for farmers being certified as organic, and his support for beginning farmer programming has protected the foundation for cultivating future generations of farmers. Because of Senator Kohl's balanced and steady approach to supporting these and other initiatives, his outstanding service to agriculture and natural resources will remain a lasting legacy for generations to come.

**Margaret Krome, Policy Program Director
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establishment of national standards for organic designation and labeling through the National Standards for Organically Grown Food Act. In later years, Kohl announced substantial grant funding through the USDA to defray the cost of organic certification for producers who wish to be designated as such.

Kohl recognized that the organic industry was one of the fastest growing segments of the food industry. In 2000, Wisconsin alone had 1,016 certified organic producers, the second highest number nationally; the state also ranked second in acres of certified organic cropland.

Through the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, which he chaired, Kohl backed several programs (eg., the Organic Transition Program and the National Organic Program) to address the transition process to certified organic production including soil and crop fertility and pest management.

Kohl also secured increased investments in the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program which provides funding for research and education to improve the viability and sustainability of small family farms. It supports on-farm research into farming methods that reduce agricultural chemical use and increase profitability.

Realizing that transitioning to more sustainable methods of food production

Anytime I think about Senator Kohl, I get a big smile on my face and great sense of joy knowing this amazing man. Senator Kohl is a true friend to family farmers here in Wisconsin and around the country. He has listened to his constituents and has always been approachable. Even more important, he has known how to get things done with his congressional colleagues. Mere words cannot describe all the important things he has done for sustainable and organic agriculture. His efforts have impacted so many important government programs, including the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, ATTRA, EQIP, Organic Certification Cost Share, Value Added Producers Grant Program, and Organic Data Collection. Senator Kohl has been a leader in moving us toward a more sustainable agriculture landscape that can provide healthy food for all.

**Faye Jones, Executive Director
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requires more than just dollars, Kohl supported programs that helped Wisconsin farmers transition into grazing rather than feed lot production. Specifically, the Grazing Education Initiative helps farmers carry out sustainable practices that preserve the land and environment as well as provide toxin-free meat for American families.