



Obama & Vilsack plan to nominate Dr. Elisabeth Hagen as USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Washington, Jan. 25 – In the wake of continuing major food recalls, President Obama announced Monday his intention to nominate Dr. Elisabeth Hagen as the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Under Secretary for Food Safety.

“There is no more fundamental function of government than protecting consumers from harm, which is why food safety is one of USDA’s top priorities,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “We can and must do a better job of ensuring the safety of meat and poultry products regulated by USDA, and Dr. Hagen brings the background, skills, and vision to lead USDA’s efforts to make sure that Americans have access to a safe and healthy food supply.”

The Food Safety mission of USDA includes the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), which is the public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture responsible for ensuring that the nation’s commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. When the President announced the creation of the Food Safety Working Group last March, he said, “In recent years, we’ve seen a number of problems with the food making its way to our kitchen tables. . . That is a hazard to public health. It is unacceptable.” President Obama charged Secretary Vilsack and Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, the co-chairs of the Food Safety Working Group, with working to upgrade food safety laws for the 21st century; foster coordination throughout government; and ensure that these laws are enforced to keep the American people safe. As part of this effort, Secretary Vilsack has instituted a top-to-bottom review of USDA’s food safety regulations.

Dr. Elisabeth Hagen is currently the USDA’s Chief Medical Officer, serving as an advisor to USDA mission areas on a wide range of human health issues. Prior to her current post, she was a senior executive at FSIS, where she played a key role in developing and executing the agency’s scientific and public health agendas. She has focused on building relationships and fostering coordination with food safety and public health partners at the federal, state, and local level.

Before joining the federal government in 2006, Hagen taught and practiced medicine in both the private and academic sectors, most recently in Washington, DC. She holds an M.D. from Harvard Medical School, and a B.S. from Saint Joseph's University. Dr. Hagen completed her specialty medical training at the University of Texas Southwestern and the University of Pennsylvania, and is board certified in infectious disease. She is married and lives with her husband and two young children in Northern Virginia.

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