

# Foreword

I first became aware of food allergen issues in the late 1990s when I was Director of the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) at the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The agency had contracted with two states to survey local food manufacturing plants that made food products (such as cookies), some of which were intended to contain, and some of which were intended not to contain, common food allergens such as milk and eggs. The states collected samples of the products *not* intended to contain food allergens and tested them to verify this. The results were astounding, as an alarming percentage of products actually contained milk or eggs when they were not supposed to.

This survey caught everyone's attention. It helped explain two things: (1) why undeclared food allergens were the number one cause of Class 1 recalls (those recalls presenting the most serious risk to health) and (2) why the government and the food industry needed to do much more to reduce the likelihood of this from happening. After all, a clear and dependable food label is the only means that food allergic individuals (and parents of food allergic children) have to prevent illness and injury. Accurate food labels are truly their lifeline.

In the ensuing 10+ years, much has been done to advance the awareness of food allergen issues and to put in place systems to better protect food allergic individuals.

- US Congress passed the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) of 2004, which required the prominent listing — in plain English — of the eight most common food allergens: peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, soy, and wheat. Today, food allergic consumers (and their parents) have a much easier time determining which foods are safe for them to eat.
- The US National Institutes for Health (NIH) have significantly increased the amount of funding devoted to studying potential cures for food allergies, thereby recognizing that food allergies are a significant health issue that needs to be addressed.
- There is much greater public awareness that a food allergic individual can be placed in a life-threatening situation if the wrong food allergen is consumed. This awareness has led to greater vigilance in public schools and the passage of state laws directing that ambulances carry the drug epinephrine — which is needed almost immediately for emergency treatment.
- Most recently, in late 2010, US Congress passed sweeping food safety legislation — called the US FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) — which included a clear mandate for greater control of food allergens during the food manufacturing process.

Such progress does not happen by accident. The hard work of many, many people and organizations has been brought to bear. Three stand out for special mention.

- First was the creation of the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) over 20 years ago by two parents of a food allergic child, Anne Munoz-Furlong and Terry Furlong. Having nowhere to turn for reliable information, they decided to research the issue themselves and become a clearing-house for objective, scientific information to share with other parents like themselves. The organization grew into a membership of over 30,000, and FAAN became the world leader in food allergy education. I had the honor to serve on the FAAN Board of Directors for six years (serving as Chair for one year) and can attest to the values and dedication this group has brought to bear. More recently, FAAN merged with the Food Allergy Institute (FAI) group, with great success in raising money for clinical research to form the consolidated group called Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE).
- Second was the establishment of a clinical research program at Mt. Sinai hospital in New York. Headed by Hugh Sampson, M.D., this facility has become the national leader in food allergy clinical research. It has close ties to FARE and both of its predecessor organizations. It is hoped that more research programs will arise around the country to add to our base of expertise, and the increased number of US National Institute of Health grants referenced above should facilitate reaching this goal.
- Third is a group at the University of Nebraska, headed by Stephen L. Taylor, Ph.D., called the Food Allergy Research and Resource Program (FARRP). This group is the national leader in understanding how to detect and measure food allergens in food and in assessing the risk to health, if any, of tiny amounts of food allergens. It is hoped that research of this type will help establish ‘thresholds’ for food allergens – meaning, safe levels that food companies can test against.

Despite such progress, many challenges remain. Awareness of the food allergy issues needs to be maintained and even enhanced, education of new parents with food allergic children is a continuing necessity, advocacy for stronger laws continues, and research needs to be continued until a cure is found.

What I have learned most over the past decade is that with food allergies, there are no villains – only victims – but also many champions trying to protect them. Thankfully, the number of champions is constantly growing. Those contributing to this book are high among them and deserve our collective admiration and gratitude.

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