



How Do U.S. Consumers Handle Pre-cut Bagged Lettuce?

Chung-Tung Jordan Lin, Ph.D. (chung-tung.lin@fda.hhs.gov)

Linda Verrill, Ph.D. (linda.verrill@fda.hhs.gov)

Office of Regulations, Policy and Social Sciences
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Paper presented at the American Public Health Association annual conference
November 7, 2007, Washington, D.C.

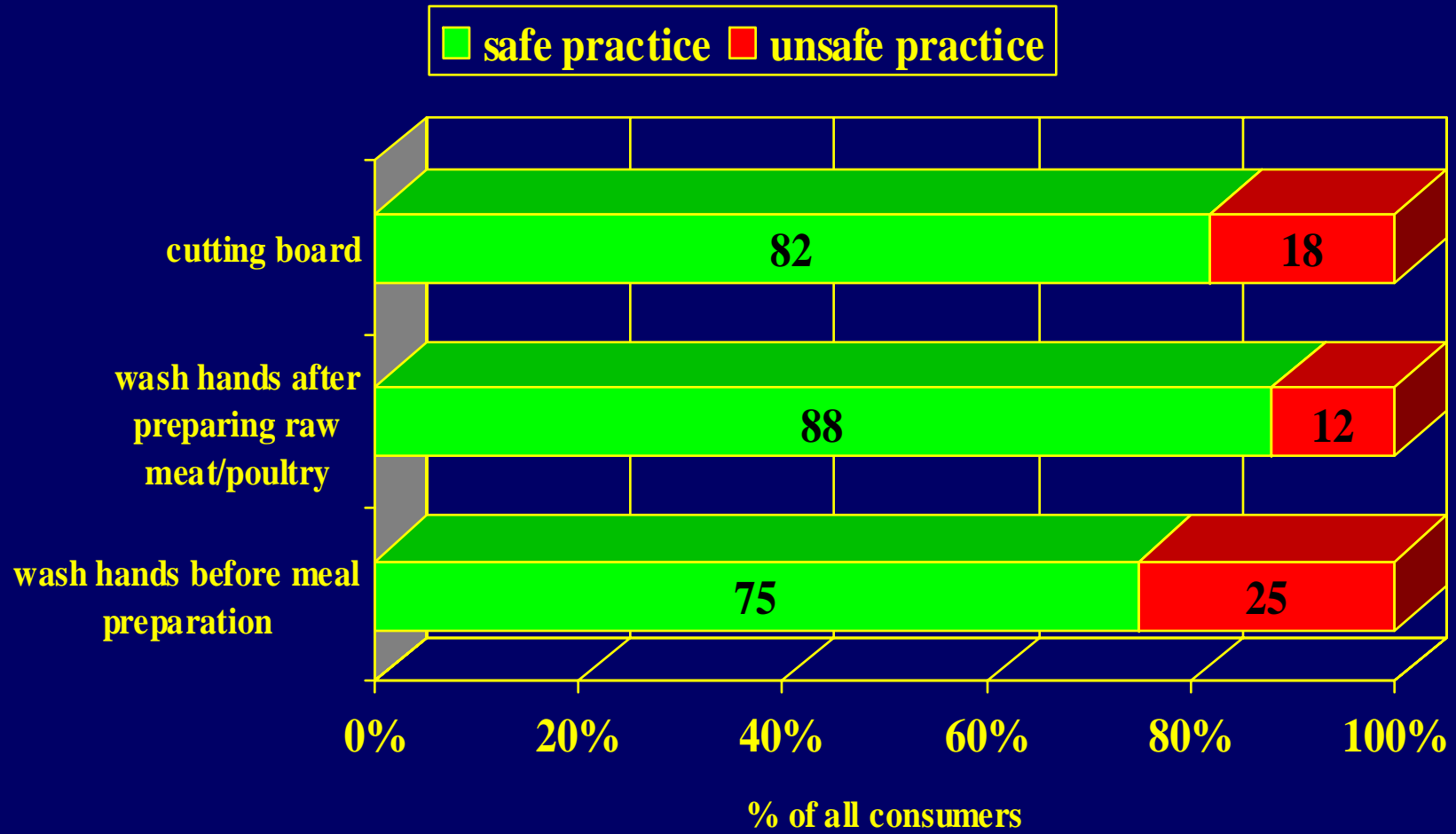
Significance of issue

- ❑ Increasing number of fresh produce related outbreaks
- ❑ Increasing popularity of bagged precut produce
- ❑ Outbreaks weaken consumer confidence and hurt sales
- ❑ Most outbreaks attributable to sources at processing
- ❑ Yet, consumer behavior may affect the risk from home prepared dishes containing precut produce

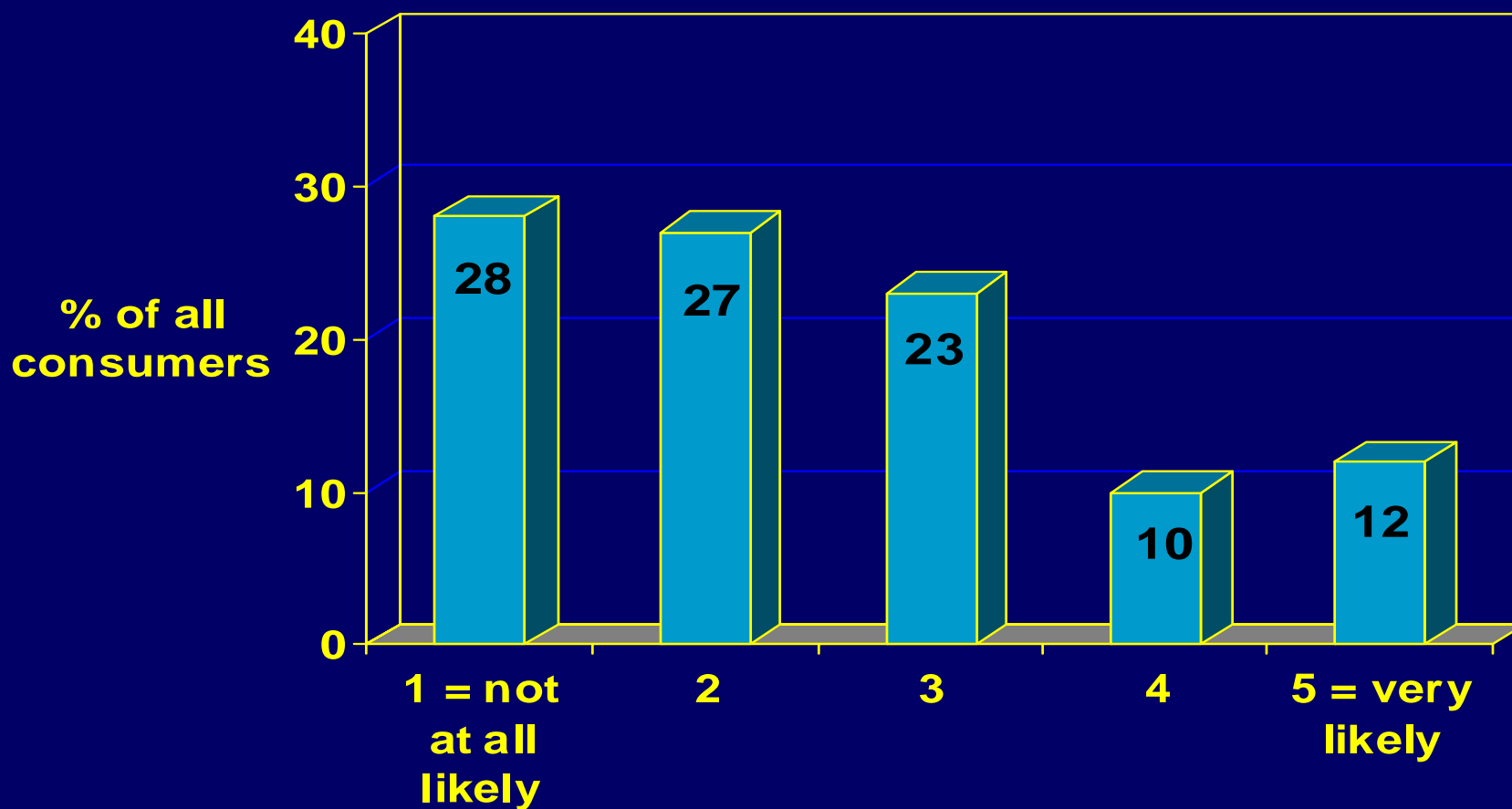
2006 FDA Food Safety Survey

- Conducted after the 2005 fresh bagged salad outbreak
 - US adults (n = 2,275); telephone survey
 - Topics
 - purchase of bagged precut lettuce
 - food handling practice, including bagged precut lettuce
 - % pre-washed
 - risk if not washed

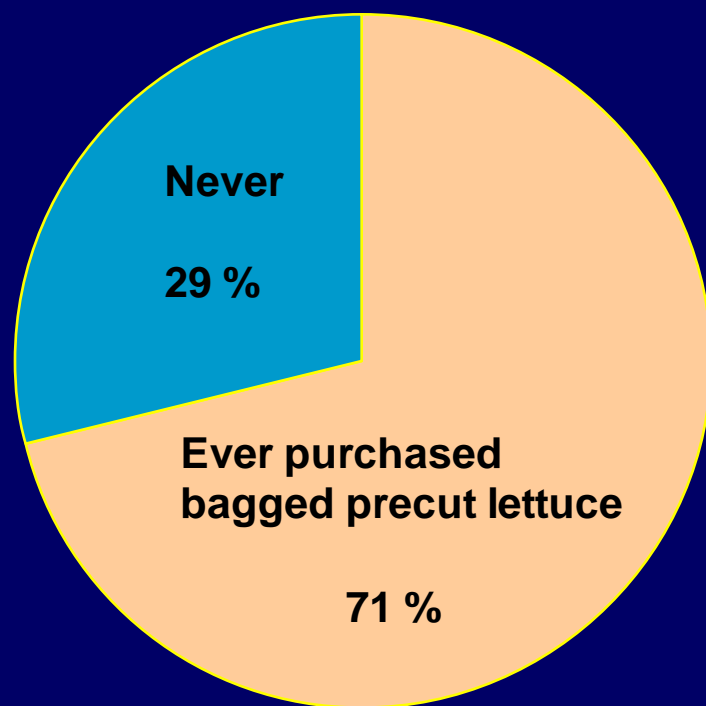
Consumer food preparation practice



Consumer perceptions of the likelihood of getting sick if bagged precut lettuce is not washed before it is eaten



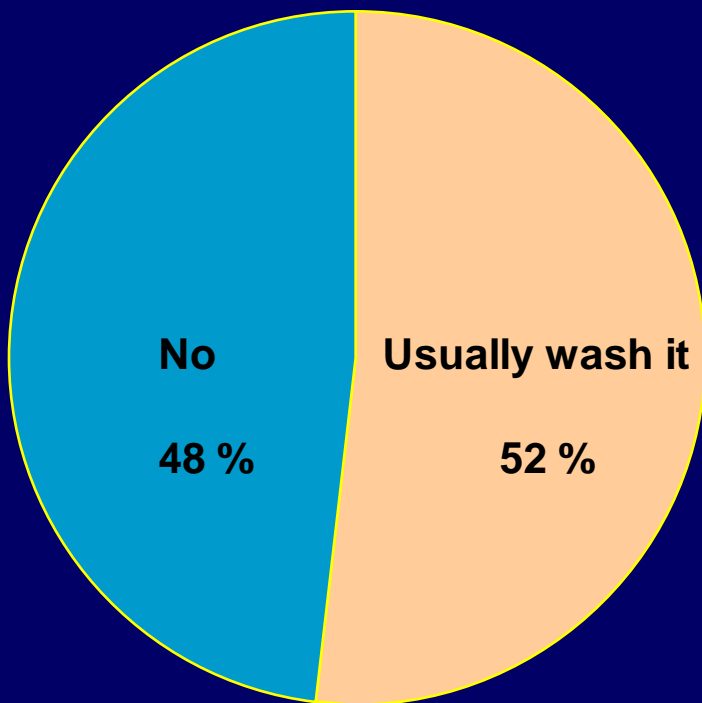
How many consumers buy bagged precut lettuce?



Lettuce buyer characteristics:

- lesser likelihood of getting sick from eating unwashed product
- eat raw sprouts
- immuno-compromised
- had foodborne illness
- college or more educated
- middle-aged
- not Hispanic

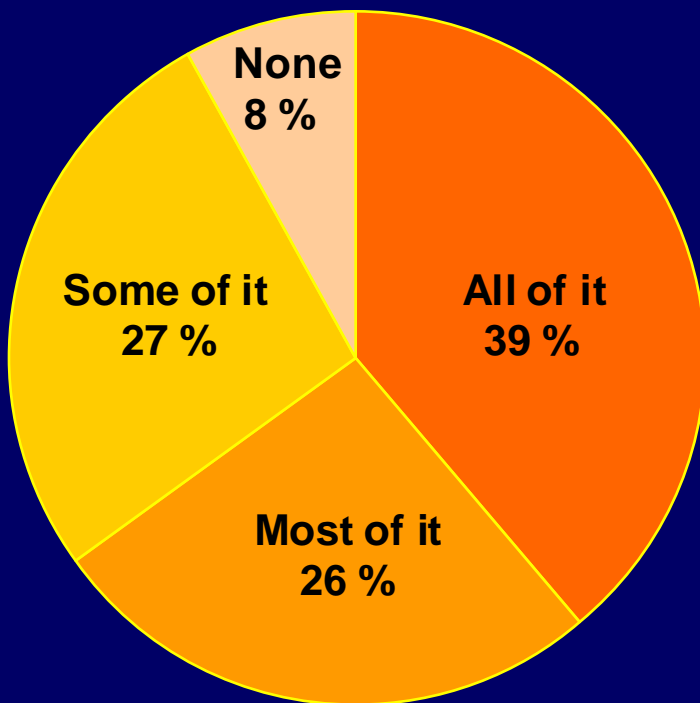
Do bagged precut lettuce buyers usually wash or rinse it before eating it?



Lettuce washer characteristics:

- believe higher likelihood of getting sick if product is not washed
- always wash hands before meal preparation
- use safe cutting board practice
- do not eat any raw sprouts
- had no foodborne illness experience
- male
- black and Hispanic
- not in the 35-54 year age group

Lettuce buyers' beliefs about how much of the bagged precut lettuce is prewashed



The more lettuce its buyers believe is prewashed, the more likely they

- believe not washing the product poses a lower risk
- prepare all or most of meals in a household
- are 55 years of age and above
- are not Hispanic



Summary and conclusions

- 2006 FDA Food Safety Survey of US adults
 - increasing availability and consumption of bagged precut lettuce
 - half buyers usually wash it; majority of buyers think most products are prewashed
 - perceived risk of products is an important factor in purchase and washing practice
 - food handling behavior suggests limited potential of cross-contamination
 - opportunities for foodborne illness may still exist due to contaminated products and/or poor handling