When *Safe Food* first appeared in 2003, food safety hardly appeared on the public agenda. American food safety advocates struggled to be heard but generated little public interest or congressional action. I wrote *Safe Food* to explain the political history of our fragmented and ineffective food safety system and how politics gets in the way of efforts to improve the system. Having no illusions that the book would do what Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* accomplished in 1906, I hoped that it would at least generate some creative thinking about food safety problems and their solutions.

I spent the next few years dealing with invitations to speak about the health implications of food marketing discussed in my earlier book, *Food Politics*. I also wrote *What to Eat*, a book that uses supermarket aisles as an organizing device for thinking about food issues, safety among them. By the time that book came out in 2006, I thought I was done with food safety. I had nothing more to say about it.

Then came September 14, 2006. On that day, one that California vegetable growers still refer to as 9/14, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced the recall of spinach contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7, the pathogen introduced in chapter 1 and discussed throughout this book. This incident brought the inadequacies of our food safety system to public attention as never before and renewed calls for mandatory regulation. As always, these calls were ignored. The result was an astonishing series of national outbreaks and food recalls, one right after another.

To my surprise, I began to receive invitations to write and speak about
food safety issues. These came with further invitations to visit farms, packing plants, and food manufacturing and processing operations. I was appointed to the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, which visited both large and small cattle, pig, and chicken farms. I also visited a free-range bison ranch. Following the pet food recalls of 2007, as part of the research for my account of those events, *Pet Food Politics* (2008), I visited factories that produce pet foods, raw and cooked. I had plenty of opportunity to see how food is produced under safe and unsafe conditions, and plenty to talk about.

In question sessions following my talks, I could hear how abstract the regulation of microbes in food feels to most people. Americans assume that the government keeps food free of contaminants and give food safety little thought. Instead, questions are about dread-and-outrage factors, topics covered in this book such as food biotechnology and irradiation, but also the right to consume raw milk, raw oysters, and other foods the government considers unsafe. Films such as *The Future of Food* and *Our Daily Bread* and, later, *Food, Inc.* and *Fresh*, dealt with such matters and generated more questions along the same lines.

It soon became clear that *Safe Food* still had plenty to say about current events and, perhaps, could be made more useful to a wider audience. In rereading it, I was relieved to find that it holds up well in establishing the historical basis of our current food safety predicaments. For this new edition, I corrected typos, clarified a few fuzzy points, changed some tenses from present to past, and wrote an epilogue to bring the events up to date. Otherwise, the original text remains. But I did think one additional change was needed. The book’s subtitle, *Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism*, did not reflect its overarching theme: that food safety is political. The new subtitle, *The Politics of Food Safety*, is really what this book is about.

Here, I argue that whether we view microbes or genetic modifications as the greater hazard depends on whether we look at foods through the lens of scientific or other value systems. Microbial contamination is responsible for an estimated 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths in the United States each year. Food biotechnology is responsible for no measurable human illness to date. Yet public dread and outrage about food safety problems continues to be much more about genetic modification than about the unlucky victims of severe food poisonings.

In part, the disconnect between science and values explains why it is so difficult to get Congress to act on matters of food safety. Congress
also views microbes as so familiar and so much under personal control that no governmental action is needed. Food industry pressures encourage this view. I have long said that nothing short of the death of a close relative of a senior senator by food poisoning will induce Congress to fix the food safety system. Otherwise, Congress will continue to respond to pressures from food corporations willing to cut safety corners and place their customers at risk to protect profit margins.

At the time of this writing, Congress is about to pass a new food safety bill, but one designed to fix only the FDA, not the system as a whole. Absent from the current debate is public dread and outrage about microbial contaminants and the politics of food safety. Without stronger public support for coordinated mandatory regulation of the entire food safety system, we can expect outbreaks and massive food recalls to continue, and even more people to suffer from illnesses that easily could have been prevented.

A NOTE ON THE NOTES

Serious researcher that I am, I must mention the alarming challenge posed by updating the endnotes to this book. Seven years after publication of the first edition, I could not find more than a handful of the eighty or so Internet references at their original addresses (URLs). Using titles, I was able to find most at new locations, but some seem to have vanished into cyberspace. I was dismayed to discover that the Internet is not the permanently tamperproof file cabinet I had imagined it to be. Fortunately, the titles are permanent. At the time of this writing they could be found at the listed URLs, but these must be considered ephemeral.

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