



## Ninety-three percent of U.S. consumers aware of recent food safety concerns

**New York, February 13, 2009** – More than nine in ten U.S. consumers (93 percent) have recently read or heard reports of food safety issues and recalls and almost a fourth of Americans said the recalls will change their long term food buying behavior, according to a new study of U.S. consumer attitudes about food safety published today by Burson-Marsteller and Penn Schoen & Berland Associates.

The study also found that while two-thirds (68 percent) of Americans believe the instances of food contamination have increased in the past five years, 87 percent continue to somewhat or strongly agree that the United States has one of the strongest food safety systems in the world.

“This study clearly shows a growing awareness among the American public about issues related to food safety and the need for food manufacturers and producers to be prepared to address them quickly and openly,” said Bill Zucker, Managing Director and food issues expert at Burson-Marsteller.

“While most food producers take significant measures every day to protect our food, this should serve as a wakeup call to companies: Now is the time to perform a checkup on your crisis communications plan,” Zucker said. “The good news for food companies is that there are some key actions they can take to regain the trust of consumers should an outbreak occur. But those actions require advanced preparation.”

The study found that companies with strong brand awareness are more likely to withstand an incident of food contamination than less well known companies. An incident of contamination at a familiar company is more likely to be judged as an isolated event than a similar incident at a lesser known food company. The study also identified some actions companies could take to reassure the public during a contamination outbreak. For example, consumers look for information such as the brand names involved and what precautions to take if a family member becomes exposed.

“Consumers have high expectations about what food companies and regulators should do to ensure their safety,” said Amy Leveton, Senior Vice President at Penn Schoen & Berland Associates. “This study shows that this is a critical time for the industry as there is a window of opportunity for companies and the industry to demonstrate that the safety of their products continues to be their top priority.”

Some of the survey's other key findings include:

- Nearly half (49 percent) of mothers say they are avoiding products with peanut butter ingredients even if they are not on the government's recall list. Nineteen percent (19%) of mothers went as far as throwing away all peanut products in their house even though there is no safety issue with many of them.
- Sixty-five percent (65%) of consumers say during a food contamination outbreak, they change their short term food buying habits, but not long term behavior. However 23 percent of consumers (and 27 percent of mothers) said the most recent food scare will change their long term food purchasing habits.

- More than two in five consumers believe food processors are to blame for recent food contamination issues.
- One in four consumers blames regulators for recent food contamination issues.
- Nearly half of consumers believe that regulators bear the responsibility for protecting the public.

In conjunction with the survey, Burson-Marsteller launched the Quick Food Safety Communications Check Up, a method for food companies to gauge the effectiveness of their recall plans. To see more data from this survey and to learn more about the check up, visit: [www.BM.com/Food\\_Safety](http://www.BM.com/Food_Safety).

###

**Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates**, a unit of the WPP group (NASDAQ = WPPGY) is a global research-based consultancy that specializes in messaging and communications strategy for blue-chip political, corporate and entertainment clients. We have over 30 years of experience in leveraging unique insights about consumer opinion to provide clients with a competitive advantage - what we call Winning Knowledge™. PSB executes polling and message testing services for Fortune 100 corporations and has helped elect more than 30 presidents and prime ministers around the world. More information is available at [www.psbresearch.com](http://www.psbresearch.com).

**Burson-Marsteller** ([www.burson-marsteller.com](http://www.burson-marsteller.com)), established in 1953, is a leading global public relations and communications firm. It provides clients with strategic thinking and program execution across a full range of public relations, public affairs, advertising and web-related services. The firm's seamless worldwide network consists of 71 offices and 58 affiliate offices, together operating in 83 countries across six continents.

Burson-Marsteller is a part of Young & Rubicam Brands, a subsidiary of WPP (NASDAQ: WPPGY), one of the world's leading communications services networks.