

**Opening Statement of Dr. Jose Emilio Esteban, Nominee for Under Secretary for Food Safety,  
Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry  
September 22, 2022**

*Remarks as Prepared*

Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and for your consideration of my nomination to be Under Secretary for Food Safety at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

I want to also thank all those who are responsible for my success in life, especially my family and the many women and men with whom I have served during my tenure as a Federal employee. A special thanks to my wife Mandy, my son Joseph, and daughter Emily. I continue to learn every day from them. I would also like to thank President Biden for nominating me to serve as Under Secretary and Secretary Vilsack for his trust and support. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Secretary Vilsack and Congress to ensure a safe and nutritious food supply for all consumers.

When I migrated to the United States in 1985, I would have never envisioned the breadth and magnitude of the opportunities this country would offer me. Opportunities I jumped at and that have brought me here today. My mother's cousin, David, opened his home to me and sponsored me into the U.S. I remember our first stop, right from the airport was the Social Security Office, so I could get a number and start working. Welcome to America! In the ensuing nearly forty years I've worked in tomato fields, in the retail industry, marketing, put on rodeo shows, and obtained two additional academic degrees.

For the last thirty years I've had the privilege to work for the Federal government. First as an epidemic intelligence service officer and staff epidemiologist at CDC and then at USDA in multiple locations and areas of responsibility, most recently as chief scientist. In those 30 years, I've worked alongside dedicated administrators, staff, plant personnel, veterinarians, and others with a shared goal of safeguarding America's food supply. I've also traveled the world on behalf of FSIS, working with local people, sharing meals, and exchanging thoughts. Because of these experiences, I understand how important a role USDA plays in the world providing safe and nutritious food to both our citizens and global communities.

I would like to highlight a few priority areas I intend to focus on if I am fortunate to be confirmed. First and foremost, safe and nutritious food is a right for every American; emphasis on the word "every." We

have one of the world's safest and strongest food safety systems. I intend to maintain and enhance that status.

Second, our employees are an essential part of our mission. We must ensure that their work environment is safe and affords those who seek them, opportunities to grow.

Third, we need to engage transparently with both producers and consumers, as a team. For every challenge, there is a solution that provides safe food, a healthy workplace, and continued business viability. One need not and should not compromise one for the other.

Fourth and last, we have to work more collaboratively across USDA agencies and with other public health partners. There is a plethora of opportunities for synergy and collaboration within USDA. Together we achieve more substantial and encompassing goals than by working independently.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I will work on these four areas -- safe food, safe workplace, open communication, cross-agency collaboration -- and employ these approaches when addressing challenges that can achieve long-term positive impact on the agency and food system, as well as in moments of difficulty. This is how we will protect our consumers, domestic and foreign, grow our economy, and have a healthy and productive workforce.

I am excited and eager for this opportunity, if confirmed, to lead USDA's food safety work for the Biden-Harris Administration and further the administration's efforts to transform America's food system and support more resilient local and regional food production, while ensuring access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food in all communities. The outpouring of interest USDA has seen from farmers and rural communities and businesses, particularly from our small to mid-sized meat and poultry processing facilities, as they seek ways to build new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers and transforming our food system has been inspirational.

I'd like to again thank President Biden and Secretary Vilsack for their support and thank you Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The United States has afforded me opportunities that I have valued throughout my career. The possibility of serving as the next Under Secretary for Food Safety, is an opportunity I see as way to give back to a nation that has given me so much. I look forward to your questions.