

# NATIONAL FOOD SAFETY

IS TOP CONCERN FOR ALUM by Lisa Spellman

## From farm to table, Nebraska native sets USDA policies

At the end of every food safety presentation, Richard Raymond, M.D., shows his favorite slide.

It's a picture of him holding his infant grandson.

"This is the reason I take food safety so seriously," he tells the audience.

Dr. Raymond and his grandson represent the demographic – the young and old – who are most affected by food borne illnesses.

As the Under Secretary for Food Safety to the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Dr. Raymond has devoted much of the past three years of his life making sure the food supply in the United States is safe to eat.

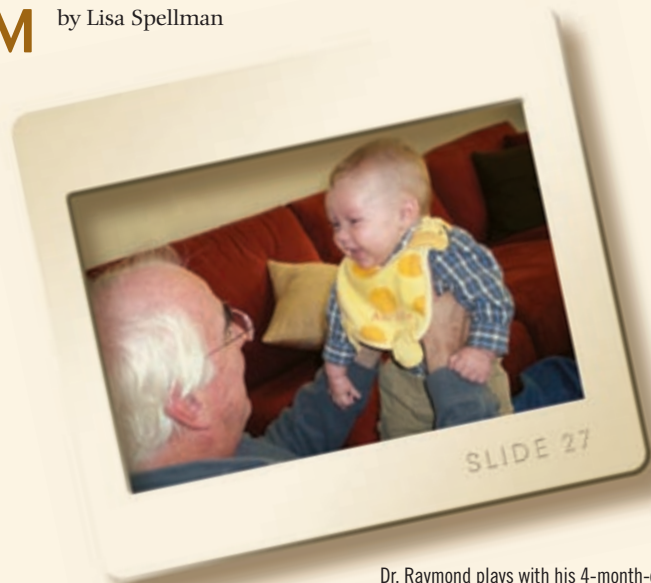
It's a little different from what he started out doing, but just as valuable to public health.

"The impact on people's lives is so much wider in public health service," Dr. Raymond said. "I had no idea I would love it as much as I do."

A native of Loup City, Neb., Dr. Raymond knew he wanted to raise his children in a rural setting.

After graduating from UNMC in 1972, he established a family practice in O'Neill with his wife, Carol Jane Raymond, a nurse who also graduated from UNMC in 1971.

Dr. Raymond's first foray out of rural medicine came in 1990 when he was asked to establish the family practice residency program at Clarkson Hospital.



Dr. Raymond plays with his 4-month-old grandson, Drew Allen Raymond.

It was a challenge he relished.

"I enjoyed the challenge of taking on something new and watching the students grow from being young, anxious residents to becoming confident and competent physicians," he said.

An even bigger challenge came when former Nebraska Gov. Mike Johanns asked him to become the state's chief medical officer.

During his tenure as chief medical officer, Dr. Raymond solved one of the biggest challenges facing the state.

At the time, Nebraska didn't have many public health departments that could conduct epidemiology investigations, track outbreaks or provide mass immunizations and public health education, something that was badly needed in the state, he said.

It took six years and funding from the state and federal government, but Dr. Raymond was able to establish 18 multi-county public health departments.

"This accomplishment provided the state public health officials with partners throughout the state of Nebraska that could respond to emergencies and also on a daily basis provide public health education," he said.

Not long after Johanns was appointed secretary of the USDA by President George Bush, Dr. Raymond was tapped to become under secretary for food safety.

In this role, Dr. Raymond oversees the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), which carries out USDA's food safety regulatory program, as well as important public health outreach and education activities focused on enhancing the safety of the U.S. food supply.

The mission of the FSIS is to ensure the safety and wholesomeness of the nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry and egg products. It doesn't matter, he said, if those products are imported to, or exported from, the United States.

"Most of the time, the attention and emphasis at FSIS is placed on our inspection activities, which have had a daily effect on nearly every household in America since the 1906 Meat Inspection Act was passed," he said.

The FSIS has more than 9,400 employees, approximately 7,600 of whom are inspection and veterinary personnel present daily in nearly 6,000 meat, poultry and egg product slaughter and processing plants throughout the United States.

More recently, the agency has increased its focus on food safety by expanding the reach and impact of FSIS's food safety education messages to consumers and at-risk populations.

"We're dedicated to improving our food safety and inspection service," Dr. Raymond said. "This isn't an 'either/or' proposition. It is high time we begin to remind people the 'and' in FSIS means we have a bigger role than 'just' inspection. We want to become known as the public health branch of the USDA."

Since joining the USDA staff in 2005, Dr. Raymond has made significant contributions to improving the safety of food Americans eat, the inspection process of production plants and the recall process.

The improvement of recall notices makes Dr. Raymond particularly proud.

Before, it was never announced which stores sold a recalled product.

Hopefully that will soon no longer be the case.

Dr. Raymond rewrote the rules and regulations to require the public identification of stores in which the recalled item was sold.

"It only makes sense to help the consumer protect themselves and their families," Dr. Raymond said. ☺

Dr. Raymond discusses the safety issues surrounding imported food at an October Import Safety Working Group meeting in Washington, D.C.

