

# Food Safety & Security: more discipline(s) required

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Universities tasked with ensuring food safety and food security need more of what they already have: academic discipline.

Universities receiving public funds to advance North American food safety and security must blend insights from multiple academic disciplines. By sewing together research from the fields of microbiology, sociology, economics, et cetera—indeed, the list does and should go on—universities can paint truer pictures of today's food safety and security problems and solutions.

As faculty based at research institutions in the United States and Canada, we have been persuaded of the merits of multidisciplinary research. Here we would like to propose how to encourage such scholarship.

What specific strategies will further assist food safety and security academics as they try to dig themselves out of their one-dimensional "silos" of expertise?

First, universities must identify and empower interdisciplinary-trained faculty to facilitate and coordinate multidisciplinary programs. Peppered across North American university campuses, there are faculty members who have pioneered investigations on the basis of multidisciplinary frameworks. University food safety and security leaders must identify these faculty, and then assign to them the responsibility for multidisciplinary enterprises. Responsibilities should include initiating, coordinating, and finishing projects.

Second, and significantly, universities must adopt policies that clearly—with no room for retreat—recognize and affirm interdisciplinary program facilitation and coordination as scholarly activities for tenure purposes. All too often, food safety and

security oriented departments pay lip service to the importance of multidisciplinary research but in practice cannot sustainably encourage the cause to which they profess commitment. Usually, this dilemma occurs as departments are encumbered by traditionally held promotion-and-tenure rules—rules which emphasize only a department's primary discipline.

Lastly, and to guard against the creation of yet another "silo," faculty conducting multidisciplinary research must contribute to their primary home department and discipline. That is, faculty must bring their multidisciplinary perspectives to bear on their colleagues' research problems. In this way, university departments will better appreciate the benefits of multidisciplinary research.

Today's food safety and security challenges include bovine spongiform encephalopathy, the prevailing *Listeria* threat, food security in a post-9/11 era, obesity, and international trade disputes. Understanding these challenges requires insights from a range of disciplines. Blending these insights is not a futile academic exercise. Rather, those refusing to engage in such activities risk missing the multi-dimensional nature of today's food system.

While seemingly esoteric and impractical, the discipline to rely upon multiple disciplines is sorely needed.

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