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SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE ANNOUNCES $25 MILLION NOROVIRUS COLLABORATIVE GRANT

IFSH is part of a multi-institutional research effort to study and mitigate foodborne illnesses associated with viruses

(Milwaukee, WI) August 3, 2011 – The Institute for Food Safety and Health (IFSH) at Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), is one of more than 30 institutions awarded a $25 million collaborative grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to strengthen food safety by studying human noroviruses across the food supply chain in an effort to design effective control measures and reduce the number of virus-caused foodborne illnesses.

The grant was officially announced today by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack at the International Association for Food Protection Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, WI. Secretary Vilsack told the audience of food safety professionals that USDA NIFA has made food safety research one of its top priorities. Last year, NIFA funded more than $70 million in food safety research and education projects.

"Today, I’d like to announce a $25 million award to study human noroviruses across the food supply chain," said Secretary Vilsack. "This is important work, and will help us understand how human noroviruses are transmitted and survive in food, and ultimately strengthen our efforts to control them. Enhancing our understanding of human noroviruses is the first step toward reducing the number of foodborne illnesses they cause."

The $25 million grant will fund the development of a team of researchers, led by North Carolina State University, to establish the USDA-NIFA Food Virology Collaborative to increase understanding of foodborne viruses through a range of scientific studies and education initiatives.
"IFSH is excited to be a partner and contribute to the goals of this important project," said Robert E. Brackett, PhD, IIT vice president and IFSH director, following the announcement.

Alvin Lee, PhD, IFSH director of microbiology and a consortium co-project director and theme leader for preventive controls, says the institute's **Biosafety Level 3 (BSL-3) biocontainment facility** offers unique capabilities to the project. "IFSH is contributing to the grant its specialized capabilities in developing and validating processing technologies, in particular high pressure processing and high power ultrasound technologies to control foodborne viruses."

Human noroviruses are the most common cause of foodborne disease, responsible for more than 5 million cases in the United States each year. Noroviruses spread from person to person, through contaminated food or water, and by touching contaminated surfaces. Molluscan shellfish like oysters, clams and mussels, fresh produce and foods that are extensively handled just prior to consumption are at greatest risk for contamination.

The project has six core objectives:

- Develop improved methods of studying human noroviruses and their role in foodborne illnesses.
- Develop and validate rapid and practical methods to detect human noroviruses.
- Collect and analyze data on viral foodborne illnesses – including how they are transmitted – and provide risk and cost analyses.
- Improve understanding of how human noroviruses behave in the food-safety chain in order to develop scientifically justifiable control measures.
- Develop online courses and curricula for food safety and health professionals and food service workers, and provide information to fresh produce and shellfish producers and processors on the risks, management and control of foodborne viruses.
- Develop a public literature database, build virus research capabilities in state public health laboratories, and develop graduate-level curricula to educate masters and doctoral students trained in food virology.

In addition to IFSH, the core team includes scientists from lead institution North Carolina State University, Clemson University, Baylor College of Medicine, Emory University, Research Triangle Institute, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the University of Georgia, NC A&T State University, and NC Central University. Other key collaborators hail from the University of Delaware, the Ohio State University, Louisiana State University, and other institutions.
State University, the U.S. FDA and USDA Agricultural Research Service, Arizona State University, New Mexico State University, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and Rutgers University. Various industrial and government stakeholders will serve the collaborative in advisory capacity.

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**Illinois Institute of Technology’s (IIT) Institute for Food Safety and Health (IFSH)** is a one-of-a-kind applied food research institute that provides stakeholders in government, industry and academia the opportunity to develop and exchange knowledge and expertise to address key issues in food safety, food defense and nutrition. Powered by a singular combination of in-depth food science expertise and state-of-the-art research capabilities, IFSH’s collaborative research model helps stakeholders define and design innovative and practical approaches to solving real-world challenges in food industry operations. Located at IIT’s Moffett Campus in Bedford Park, IL, IFSH is also home to the FDA CFSAN Division of Food Processing Science and Technology. For more, visit [www.iit.edu/ifsh](http://www.iit.edu/ifsh)