FoodTrack Inc.
FOOD SAFETY INTELLIGENCE

Annual Trend Report
2020

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2020 At A Glance

Live Reporting 2020

Q1 2020 Q2 2020 Q3 2020 Q4 2020
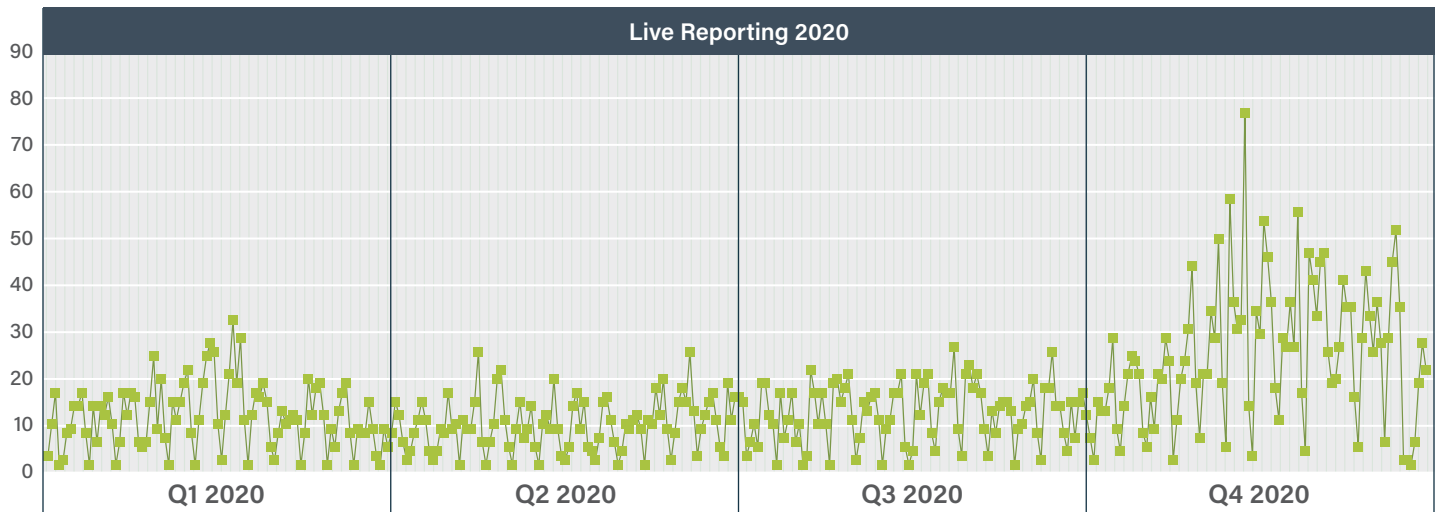
Figure 1-A

5,000
alerts

906
allergen related

569
organic products

86%
from non-agency sources

7%
resulted in reactions, illnesses, injuries, or deaths

4%
Class I Recalls

Since the creation of our internal database in 2012, the FoodTrack team has reported and compiled over 36,000 Alerts concerning the safety of consumer goods including food, general merchandise, and pharmaceuticals. Our editorial team tracks over 300 unique sources in addition to major regulatory agencies (FDA, USDA/FSIS, CDC, CFIA) to provide clients with accurate and time-sensitive recall and industry information from around the world.

Our goal is to be the most comprehensive resource the food industry can rely on. With this mission in mind, we are offering a new service in 2021: **custom data analytics reports**. We can filter our Alerts by over 200 metadata tags; since 2012, over 330,000 tags have been applied.

Product Categories

Our data can be sorted by the following major categories: Report Type, Product Type, Reason for Recall, Source, Scope of Distribution, Packaging, and Region. While a vast majority of our Alerts are publicly announced product recalls, we also track regulatory announcements, Warning Letters, and FDA Enforcement Reports.

Figure 2-A shows the key food product categories FoodTrack Alerts are broken down into — our 'Other Foods' category encompasses prepared items, snacks, condiments, beverages, baked goods, and more processed foods. While this category typically has higher numbers than the others, 2020 was exponentially higher for both Other Foods and Nuts & Seeds due to the high levels of Ethylene Oxide found in sesame products in Europe and Asia.
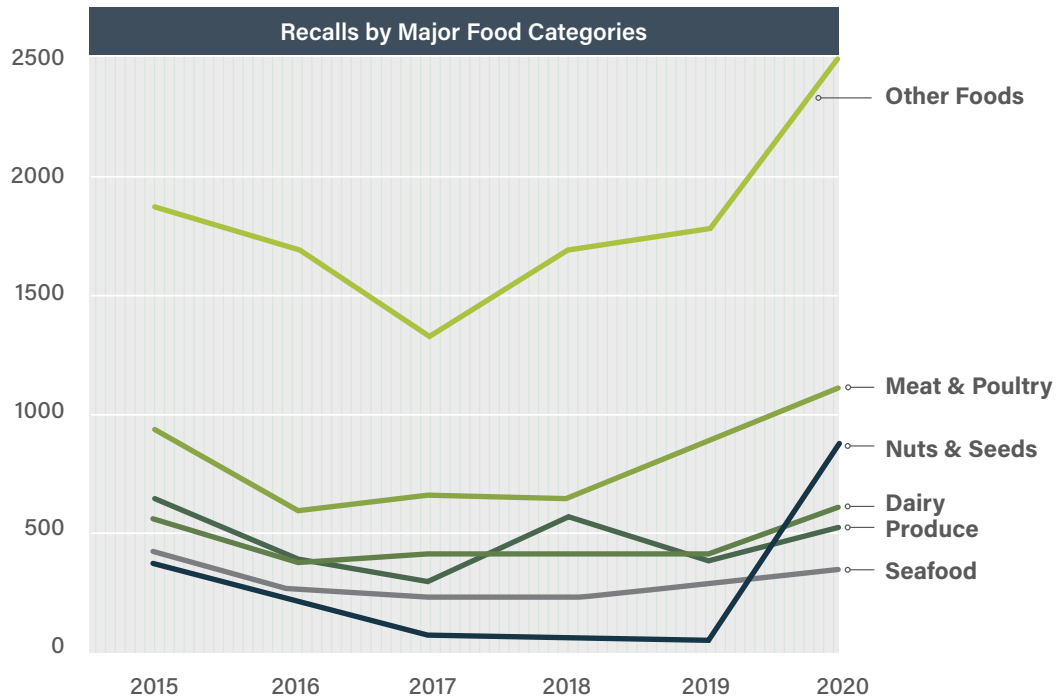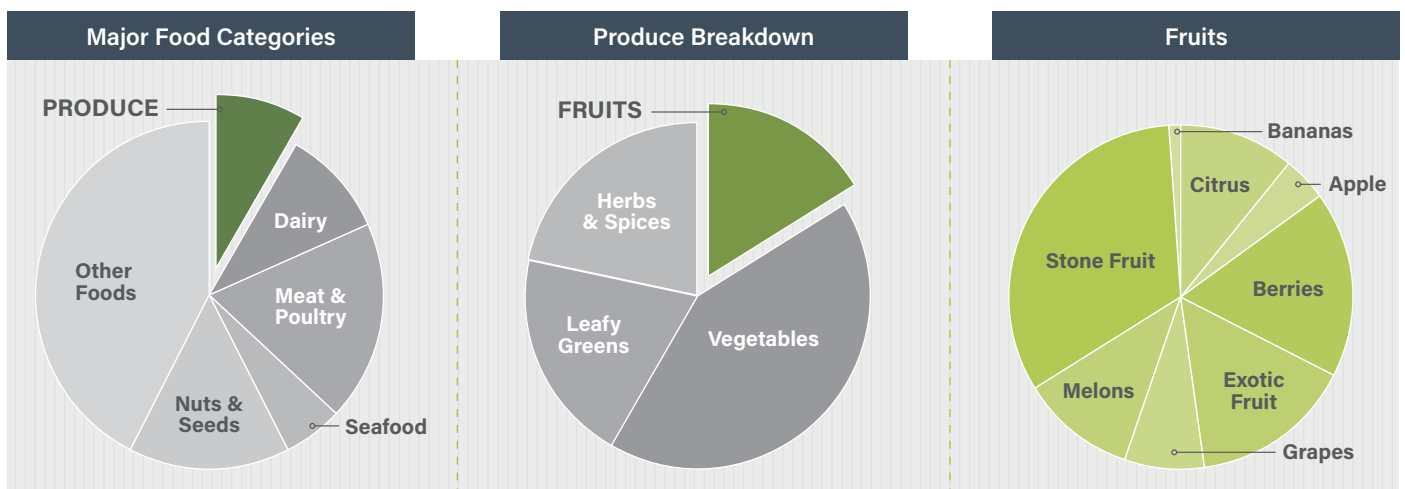

Figure 2-A

Each major category can be further drilled down to secondary and tertiary levels where applicable. The graphs below illustrate an example of how the Produce category can be broken down further.

Non-Food Breakdown

In addition to food products, we track other consumer goods including General Merchandise, Pharmaceuticals, Health & Beauty Care, and Pet Feed. A large spike in these categories — especially in HBC — was observed in the summer of 2020.
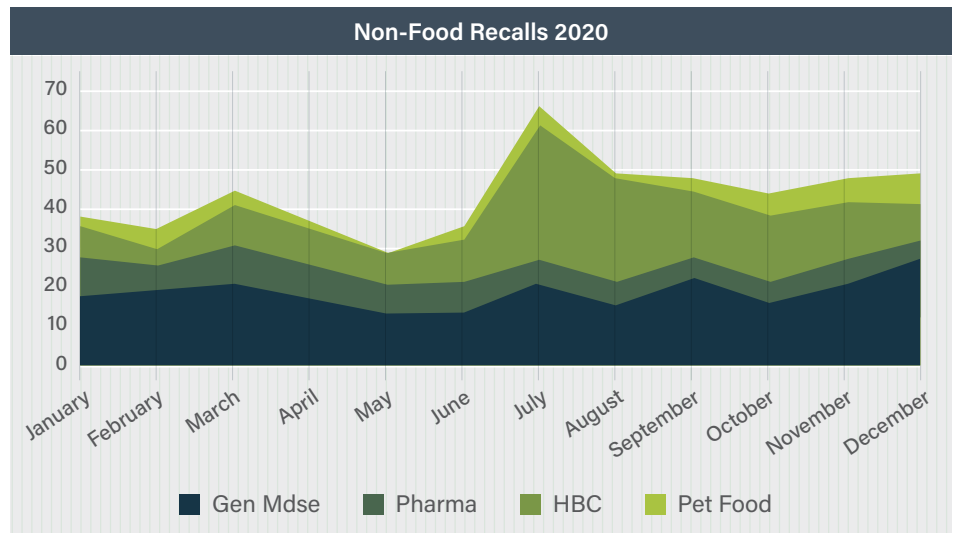
Non-Food Recalls 2020

Demand for sanitizing and disinfectant products rose substantially in response to COVID-19, causing retailers at all levels to ration products while manufacturers tried to keep up. Methanol, a highly toxic substitute for ethanol (the standard active ingredient in sanitizers), was implicated as the reason for multiple recalls over the Summer. We saw "ethanol-based" products test positive for methanol, mislabeling issues, and even reports of alcohol-based sanitizers being found packaged in food and beverage containers.
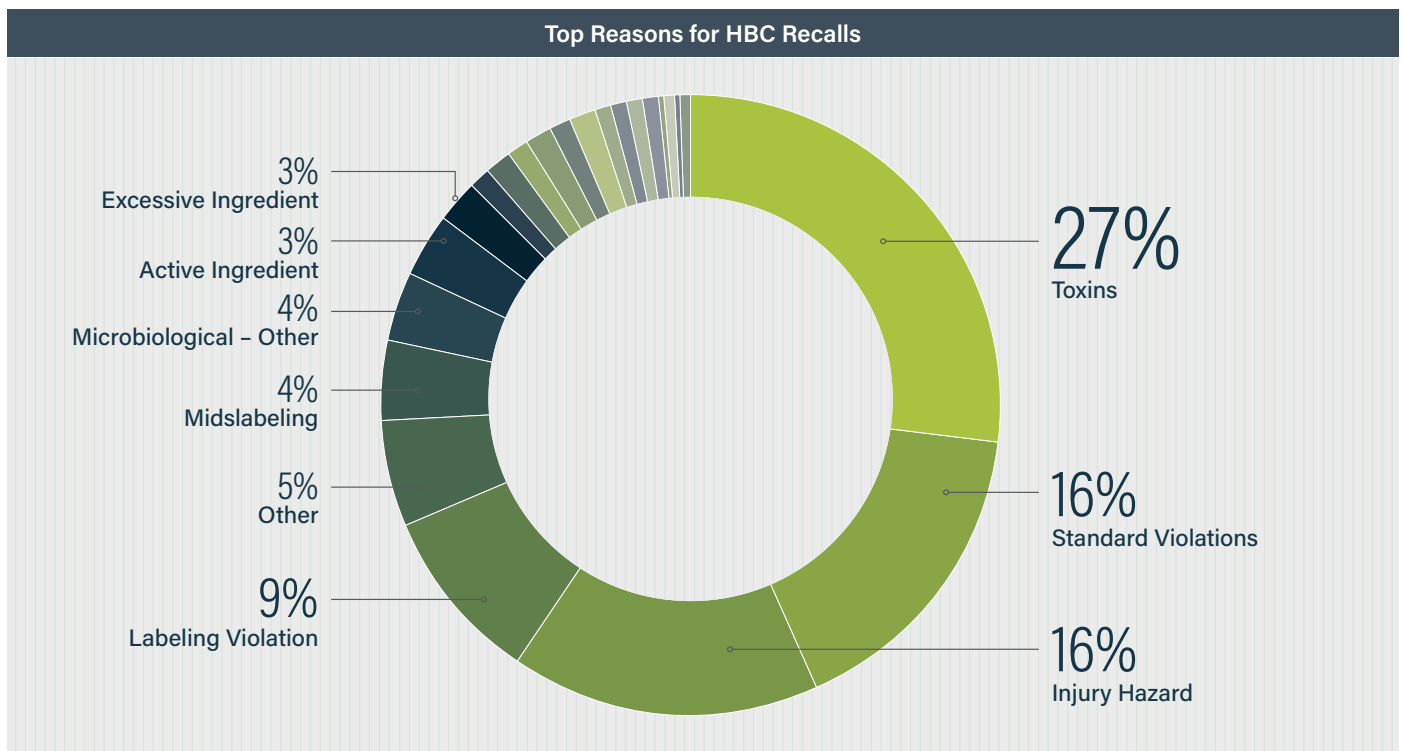
Top Reasons for HBC Recalls

- 3% Excessive Ingredient
- 3% Active Ingredient
- 4% Microbiological – Other
- 4% Midslabeling
- 5% Other
- 9% Labeling Violation
- 27% Toxins
- 16% Standard Violations
- 16% Injury Hazard

European Reports

Following the trend of previous years, Europe had the highest number of food-related Alerts, accounting for 62% of all reports in 2020.
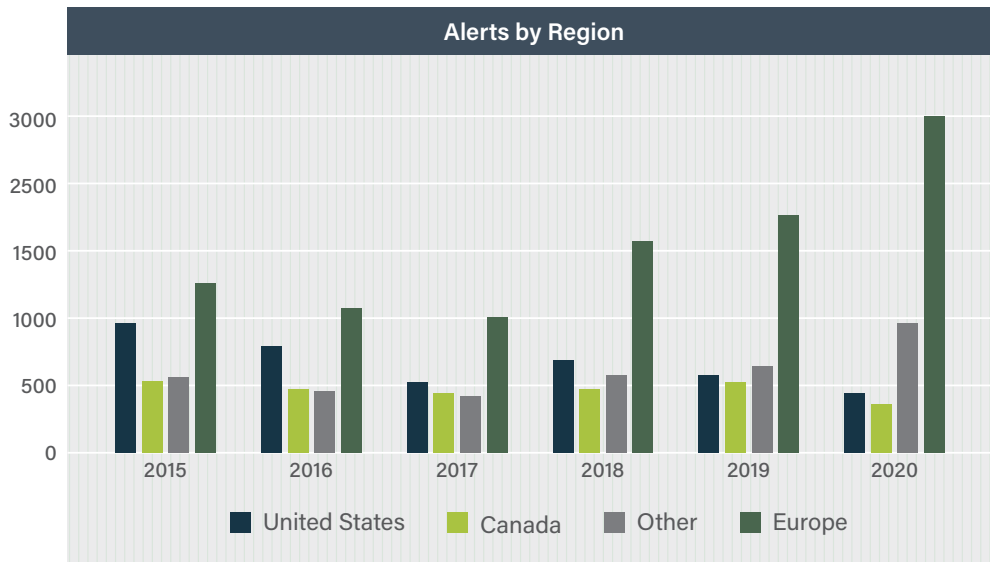
Alerts by Region

The Ethylene Oxide/Sesame products event mainly affected Europe, though some Asian countries have also recalled items. While some of these same recalled products might be sold in the United States and Canada, the use of Ethylene Oxide as a sterilization agent is allowed, whereas it is highly regulated throughout Europe due to its carcinogenic properties. As we enter into 2021, the number of recalls due to Ethylene Oxide levels is slowing down as we reach over 1,200 individual Alerts in the FoodTrack database for this event.

Avian Influenza also had a significant impact on the high number of reports, with over half of the total for 2020 occurring just in Q4. According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, there were over 500 HPAI detections were reported by over a dozen European countries, with Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands being the most affected countries.
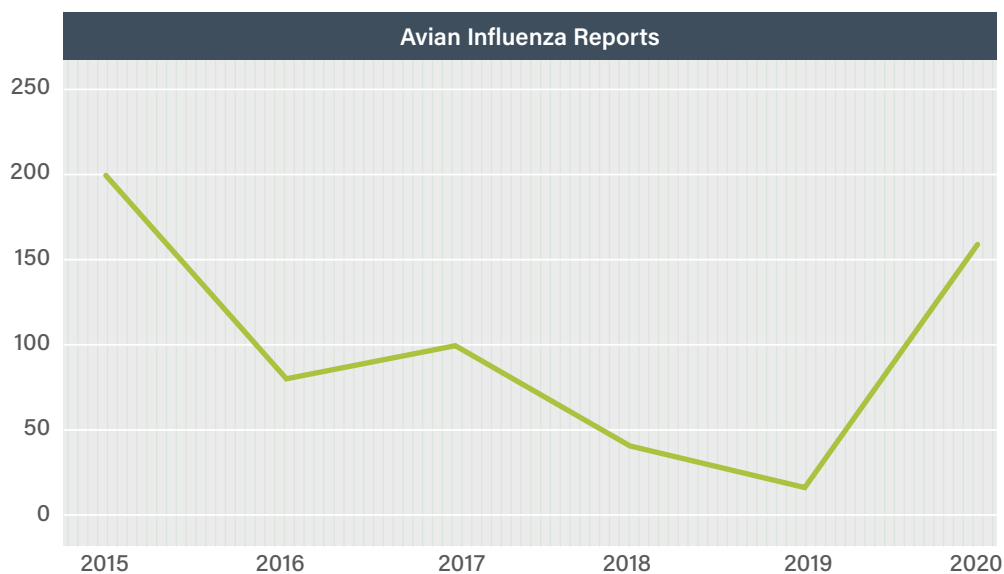
Avian Influenza Reports

Figure 4-B

COVID Closures & Effects on Industry

On top of covering more traditional food and product recalls throughout the year, we closely watched the spread of COVID-19 at meatpacking plants, food processing facilities, and farms throughout 2020. Although the virus is not considered a food safety concern — there is low risk of contraction via consumption of food products – workers in these areas were highly susceptible to contracting the disease from one another. As a result, both large and small processing facilities ceased operating for a time to curb the spread of the virus. **Figure 5-A** illustrates facility closures in the United States as they were announced to the public – most have since reopened, though many are operating at reduced capacity.

Fortunately, COVID-19 shows no signs of transmission through food, but the spread of the virus has directly impacted worker safety, severely strained supply chains, and led to product shortages and surpluses — each with their own consequences. While major kinks in the supply chain have been addressed, the pandemic is still forcing closures and workers at these facilities are still facing the risk of contraction. Though some restaurants and chains have successfully pivoted to takeout and drive thru in response to changes due to COVID-19, many continue to struggle.

A change in recall trends in the meat & poultry industry was also apparent. Although regulatory agencies continued to track outbreaks and post recalls throughout 2020, the USDA's FSIS recalls decreased substantially. Over the past five years, there were an average of over 35 recalls each quarter, but an average of only about 14 per quarter in 2020.
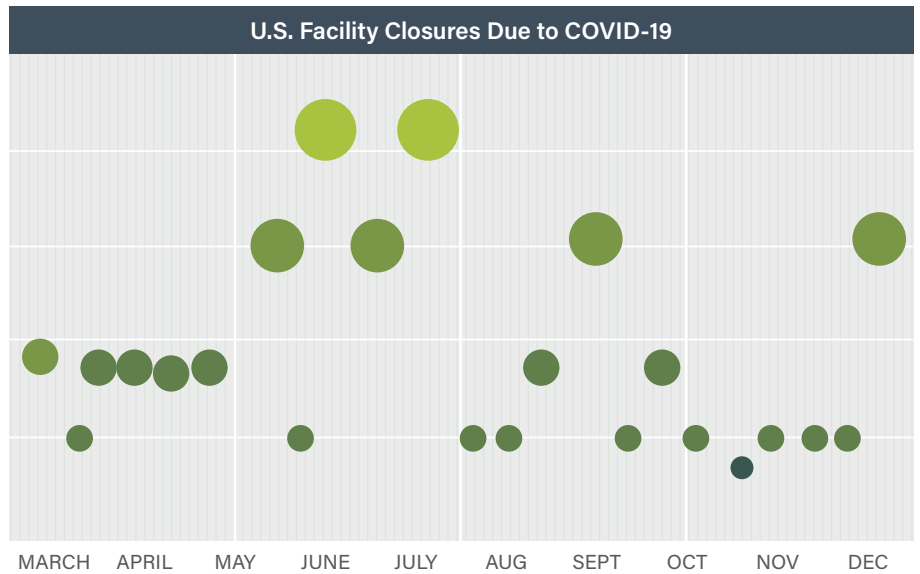

U.S. Facility Closures Due to COVID-19

Facility Closures per Day

MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY AUG SEPT OCT NOV DEC

Figure 5-A

FSIS Recalls by Quarter

Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4

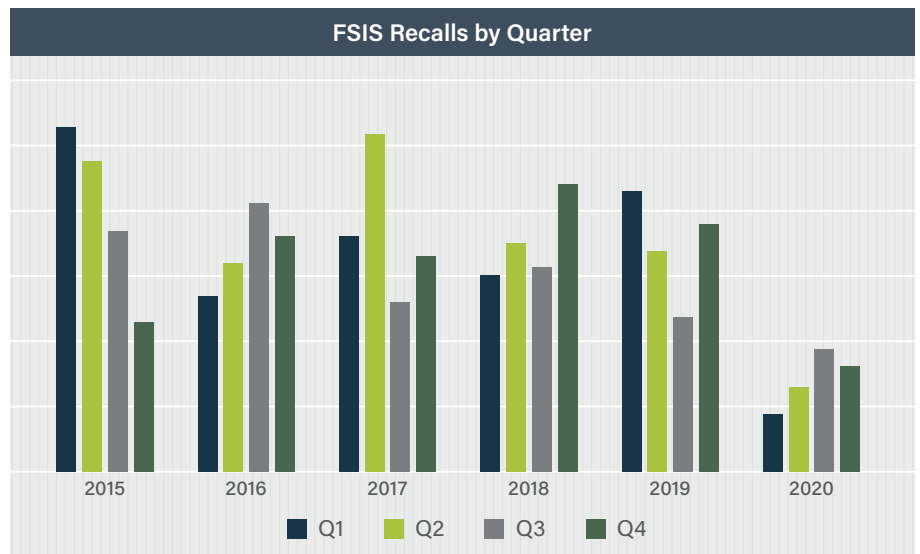2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

Figure 5-B

If you have any inquiries about this report or if you would like to request a custom report, please email **recalls@foodtrack.net**.