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Peer Review

# Review of: "Food-Contact-Surface and Product-Test *Listeria monocytogenes* Positivity in U.S. Ready-to-Eat Meat and Poultry Establishments: Concurrent, Cumulative, and Temporally Separated Associations in USDA-FSIS Sampling Data, 2015-2025"

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This paper studies an important food-safety issue using a large U.S. dataset. It looks at how Lm on food-contact surfaces relates to Lm in ready-to-eat products. The split between concurrent, cumulative, and later associations is useful. However, some key results are based on very few positive samples. The authors should clarify their main analysis, explain why they changed their focus, and discuss possible sampling biases. They should also avoid strong causal claims. With these changes, the paper would be a helpful addition to the field.

1-The prospective analysis was prespecified as primary, but the concurrent analysis became primary after the prospective analysis was sparse (Section 2.4). Could you state this more prominently in the Abstract and discuss the risk of selection bias more explicitly?

2- (Section 3.2): Could you emphasize absolute risks (20.3% vs 0.21%) more and avoid overinterpreting the large odds ratios (OR ~122–126)?

3-The paper includes concurrent, cumulative, FCS/NFCS, prospective, establishment-year, permutation, reverse-time, and many sensitivity analyses. Could you consider moving less central analyses (e.g., reverse-time, within-event burden) to the supplement to improve clarity?



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4- Please replace “independent model validation” with “independent computational verification.”

5-Please explain why RLMENVR samples were retained (n=29, all negative) and confirm they did not affect estimates.

6- Please shorten the conclusion to focus on the main supported message: strong concurrent association, weaker cumulative association, and no reliable prospective prediction.

## Declarations

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.