



FSIS Constituent Update

Volume 5, Issue 41

November 19, 2004

Protecting Public Health Through Food Safety

Secretary Veneman Resigns

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman, the first woman to hold the position, resigned on Monday leaving a legacy of contributions to food safety which included improving safeguards against bioterrorism.

“I greatly appreciate Ann’s leadership in ensuring that we responded quickly and effectively to protect the American food supply following the discovery of BSE in the United States and following September 11th. She has helped ensure common sense forest management and skillfully implemented the Healthy Forests Initiative. She has played a key role in opening markets and in ensuring a level playing field for America’s farm products,” said President George Bush.

Secretary Veneman, originally from California, served in other posts at the Department of Agriculture from 1986 to 1993 in the Reagan and first Bush administrations. She has not publicly stated her future plans. No decision has been made regarding who will succeed Ann Veneman as Secretary of Agriculture.

Web Site Now Provides One-Stop Shop for Government Recalls

Consumers can now go to www.Recalls.gov to find breaking news about product recalls. A new feature on the Web site called “Recent Recalls” allows everyone to view recall announcements the very moment they are made public by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, or the U.S. Coast Guard. The “Recent Recalls” link is the only source on the Internet for up-to-the-minute information on all government recalls. FSIS-related recalls and accompanying information can also be found directly at www.fsis.usda.gov/Fsis_Recalls/index.

Export Requirement Updates

The [Library of Export Requirements](#) has been updated to reflect changes in export requirements for the following countries:

Columbia

Japan

Mexico

Complete information is available online at:
www.fsis.usda.gov/OFO/export/explib.htm



FSIS and FNS Collaborate on New Communications System

FSIS and the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) are working to ensure that food safety concerns in the National School Lunch Program are addressed efficiently. The two agencies are developing an electronic notification system to formalize communication regarding potentially contaminated products or illnesses.

Each day, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) serves approximately 27 million lunches and eight million breakfasts to students throughout the United States. The program is designed to provide safe, wholesome and nutritious food to students. On an average day, one out of every two students participates in the NSLP. With millions of meals being served at 95,000 schools, there is potential for wide-spread exposure to foodborne illnesses.

The responsibility for safe food in NSLP is a duty that must be addressed at every step in the food chain, from production to preparation. FNS administers the NSLP and other feeding programs, while FSIS works to ensure that products destined for the NSLP are safe and wholesome. Both agencies analyzed how food safety concerns are identified and handled within NSLP and found that improvements could be made.

FNS and FSIS are working to formalize standard operating procedures (SOP) for communication and investigation activities. Communication will be coordinated through FNS' Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) and FSIS' Consumer Complaint Monitoring System (CCMS). ECOS is an electronic database which captures commodity complaints directly from NSLP participants. Those complaints involving injury, illness, allergic reaction, foreign objects, or other food safety concerns, will be automatically sent to CCMS for further analysis. "We see this partnership as critical to improving the safety of the NSLP because it gives FNS technical and field support that it otherwise does not have," said Brenda Halbrook, director of FNS' Food Safety Unit. "FNS relies heavily on its regulatory partners for help in resolving complaints about the food supplied to the NSLP through the Commodity Distribution Program."

If FSIS initiates an investigation, it will be tracked within CCMS and follow-up actions will be shared with FNS, as well as with the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) that handles commodity purchases for the NSLP.

"The technical teams for ECOS and CCMS are currently meeting to work out how the systems will interface with each other," said Kimberly Elenberg, acting director of OPHS' Human Health Sciences Division. "Our expectations are that ECOS and CCMS will communicate automatically with each other in May 2005." For more information, contact Brenda Halbrook, director of FNS' Food Safety Unit at Brenda.halbrook@fns.usda.gov



Holiday Food Safety

“What is brining and what are its benefits?”

The verb “brine” means to treat with or steep in brine. Brine is a strong solution of water and salt. The salt has two effects on poultry, reports Dr. Alan Sams, a professor of poultry science at Texas A & M University. “It dissolves protein in muscle and the salt and protein reduce moisture loss during cooking. This makes the meat juicier, more tender and improves the flavor. The low levels of salt enhance the other natural flavors of poultry.” For best results, submerge poultry in solution and store covered in the refrigerator, at least overnight. Discard brine after use. Cook turkey within two days.

FSIS Issued Directive on State Cooperative Inspection Programs

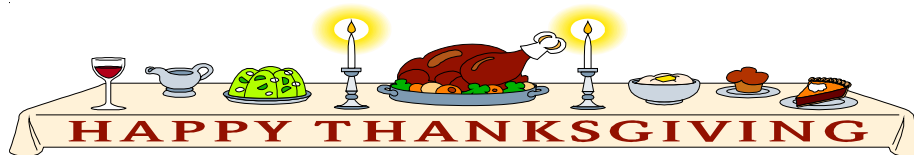
On November 16, FSIS issued FSIS Directive 5720.2, Revision 3 to articulate the policy and procedures concerning the FSIS state cooperative inspection programs. FSIS Directive 5720.2, Revision 2 was previously issued and is now cancelled because it contained sections that were out of date.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA) and the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA) provide for FSIS to cooperate with state agencies in developing and administering their own meat or poultry inspection programs. The FMIA and PPIA restrict each state meat and poultry inspection program to the inspection and regulation of product that is produced and sold within the state.

The FMIA and PPIA mandate that each state cooperative inspection program operate in a manner and with authorities “at least equal to” the antemortem and postmortem inspection, re-inspection, sanitation and recordkeeping provisions set out in the statutes. In addition, state cooperative inspection programs need enforcement authorities that are “at least equal to” those provided by the FMIA and PPIA.

FSIS defines “at least equal to” as meaning that the food safety and other consumer protection measures affected by a state program address the same issues addressed by the federal program, and the results of the state’s approach are to be at least as effective as those of the federal program. The state program need not take exactly the same action as the federal program. To view this directive in its entirety visit: www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/5720-2Rev3.pdf

The Constituent Update won't publish next week due to the Thanksgiving Holiday. The next issue will publish December 3. Have a happy and safe Thanksgiving.



To submit comments or questions, contact the editor at:

fsisupdate@fsis.usda.gov (202) 720-9113

THIS WEEK'S HOT WEB LINKS

Speeches and Presentations

www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Communications_to_Congress/

Subscribe to Newsletters

www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Newsletters/

Image and Video Libraries

www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Image_&_Video_Libraries/

