

## **What You Should Expect When You Contact the TSC with a Technical Question**

### **Commitment:**

When you contact the Office of Policy, Program, and Employee Development (OPPED), through the Technical Service Center (TSC), you will get a timely and complete answer that fully reflects the official policy of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

### **Purpose:**

This document sets out what you can expect when you call or write the TSC with a question, whether you are an FSIS supervisor, other FSIS employee, an employee from an inspected establishment or other member of industry, a consumer, an academic, or other constituent.

### **TSC Procedures:**

1) There will be someone available to take your call or read your e-mail Monday through Friday, 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central Time. Any calls made to the TSC outside of these hours will be returned by the morning of the next business day. Any e-mails sent to the TSC outside of these hours will be read by a TSC employee by the morning of the next business day.

2) When a TSC employee receives or returns a call, the TSC employee may request that both the inspected establishment and FSIS personnel be on the call to more clearly define the question and for all relevant stakeholders to hear the answers. This is because the TSC wants to be sure that the facts surrounding the inquiry are fully explored, and that the establishment and the FSIS personnel hear the same response. The TSC employee will attempt to schedule the call with the establishment and the FSIS personnel as quickly as practical. In the interim between receiving the initial call and the TSC-scheduled call, the TSC employee will research the topic.

3) Sometimes the nature of a call will be such that the TSC employee will answer the question as part of the initial call. In such cases, the TSC employee will make a written record that summarizes the question and answer. Both the question and answer are considered to be data that OPPED will analyze in a number of important ways, including for timeliness, completeness, and accuracy. If, upon further review by OPPED, the response is judged to be inadequate or incomplete, the TSC employee will contact the caller with the correct or clarifying information.

In addition, these data will also be reviewed to determine whether they evidence a pattern of misunderstanding, or lack of information, about policy questions. If such a pattern emerges, the TSC, as part of OPPED, will work to ensure that an appropriate clarification of policy is developed and issued (e.g., temporarily through a question and answer document or IKE posted to the FSIS web page or, more permanently, through an FSIS Notice, Directive, training module, or Federal Register issuance).

4) The TSC will also attempt to provide answers to e-mail as quickly as possible, within

24-48 hours. As stated in FSIS Notice 84-06, e-mailing questions may be the most efficient way to receive a response. All TSC responses to e-mail will be reviewed for accuracy and clarity before they are sent. Responses to e-mails will be factored into the review described in paragraph 3, above.

5) Occasionally, TSC employees learn in their contacts with FSIS personnel or establishment management of instances in which inspection personnel believe that they have been advised by their supervisor not to follow national policy as set out in FSIS training, in an FSIS issuance, or by TSC personnel. In such cases, information about the alleged situation of mis-application of policy will be communicated by the TSC personnel to TSC supervisory personnel who will then contact OFO and OPPED management for resolution of the situation. The proper and consistent application of policy is essential for protecting public health through food safety.