

National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection

Legislative Update for FY 2005 and 2006

Purpose

The following is a summary of the Food Safety and Inspection Service's (FSIS) FY 2005 appropriation and the Agency's budget request for FY 2006.

Discussion

FY 2005 Enacted

On December 8, 2004, FSIS was appropriated \$817.2 million for Fiscal Year 2005 as part of the Omnibus Appropriations Act. This current appropriation includes increases of \$17.3 million for frontline inspectors and humane slaughter enforcement, \$7.2 million for entry-level training for field employees, food safety regulatory essentials training and biosecurity training, \$3 million for surveillance related to BSE, \$3 million to integrate the Humane Activities Tracking System into the Agency's communications infrastructure, \$2.1 million to guard the nation's food supply from intentional contamination through biosurveillance activities, \$350,000 for microbiological baseline studies (for a total of \$2 million), and \$2 million for the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) and \$1.5 million for FERN data systems. FSIS was also directed to spend \$20.6 million on regulatory and scientific training in FY 2005.

FY 2006 Request

In FY 2006, FSIS is requesting funding of \$849.7 million, a net increase of about \$32.5 million from the enacted level for FY 2005. Of the total, \$139 million would be derived from proposed new user fees from the industry.

In order to fulfill the Agency's statutory obligations to provide continuous inspection of meat, poultry, and egg products, the budget requests an increase of \$13.9 million for the FSIS inspection program to provide for the 2.3 percent pay raise for FSIS employees in FY 2006.

The FY 2006 budget requests a \$19.5 million increase to support a food and agriculture defense initiative, a partnership with USDA, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The three Federal Departments involved are working together to create a comprehensive food and agriculture policy that will improve the government's ability to respond to the dangers of disease, pests and poisons, whether natural or intentionally introduced.

A major component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is the expansion of the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). The FSIS FY 2006 budget – which seeks

an increase of \$13 million for FERN – will enable the Agency to manage, maintain and expand the capacity and capabilities of labs seeking to participate in FERN. The budget request would also provide \$2.5 million to make the electronic laboratory exchange network (eLEXNET) available to additional FERN and other food-testing laboratories nationwide. eLEXNET is a national, web-based, electronic data reporting system that allows analytical laboratories to rapidly report and exchange standardized data.

Another component of the food and agriculture defense initiative will allow FSIS to participate in an interagency biosurveillance initiative. This initiative would improve the Federal government's ability to rapidly identify and characterize a potential bioterrorist attack by integrating FSIS surveillance data with DHS threat information. The Agency has requested an increase of \$417,000 for such biosurveillance activities.

The final component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is follow-up biosecurity training of the workforce. FSIS has requested an increase of \$1 million for additional training that is essential as part of the ongoing effort to protect the public by educating the workforce regarding the latest Agency policies, threat agents, and countermeasures to those agents.

As part of the FY 2006 budget request, FSIS is requesting an increase of \$2.2 million for relief positions so that the Agency can take full advantage of the training, experience, and responsibilities of our highly-trained Public Health Veterinarians by expanding public health activities. The Agency and the public will benefit from more effective utilization of the technical knowledge and skills of our veterinarians – such as systems analysis, epidemiology, biostatistics, microbiology, pathology, and toxicology.

In FY 2006, FSIS estimates it will collect \$122.9 million in existing annual user fees to recover the costs of overtime, holiday, and voluntary inspection. Of the \$849.7 million requested in the FY2006 budget, \$139 million is proposed to be derived from a new user fee that would recover the costs of providing inspection services beyond an approved eight-hour primary shift. A legislative proposal authorizing this new fee will soon be submitted to Congress.

On May 17, 2005, the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee approved the FY 2006 Agriculture Appropriations bill. In the version of the bill approved by the full House Appropriations Committee on May 25, 2005, the Food Safety and Inspection Service received approximately \$837 million, about \$13 million less than its total request of \$849.7 million. The recommendation did not include \$139 million in funding user fees, as proposed in the budget. It provided the full amounts requested to cover pay costs, an increase of \$13.9 million and to support frontline inspection, an increase of \$2.2 million. The Committee provided an increase of \$6.7 million for food defense activities, including \$417,000 for biosurveillance, \$2.8 million for the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN), \$2,500,000 for laboratory capacity and equipment, and \$1 million for related training. Within the base resources provided is \$5 million for enforcement of the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act.

The Committee also provided \$2 million, the same as fiscal year 2005, for outsourcing of microbiological testing, which supports the goal of establishing a continuous baseline for risk assessment. The legislation is tentatively scheduled for a vote on the House floor the week of June 6, 2005.

The Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee has not scheduled mark-up of the 2006 Agriculture Appropriations legislation.

Contact Person

Terri Nintemann
Deputy Assistant Administrator
Office of Public Affairs, Education and Outreach
Phone: 202-720-3897