

National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection

Strategic Implementation Plan for Enhancing Outreach to Small and Very Small Plants

Purpose

For USDA's more robust risk-based inspection system to be successful, all plants must have well-designed food-safety and defense systems. We recognize that we have a vital role in educating, as well as regulating, industry to achieve public health and safety. In 2005, we held outreach and listening sessions with small and very small plants in Montana, California, and Texas. Early this year, we held two more sessions in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. From these sessions, we obtained feedback that indicated that small and very small plants may need access to additional resources to assist them in designing and implementing their food safety and food defense systems.

Most recently we held a strategy session hosted by the International HACCP Alliance to identify the needs of small and very small plants. The needs and recommendations from this meeting have been reviewed by a special internal task force. The task force has developed a strategic implementation plan to enhance our outreach efforts to small and very small plants. FSIS is now seeking guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection on this plan.

Discussion

Based on the recommendations, improved assistance for food safety and defense for small and very small plants will include one-stop customer service, better access to technical resources including scientific validation materials, and easier access to education and training efforts. Partnerships with other public health entities will be expanded and better leveraged.

We will effect the strategic implementation plan to enhance our outreach efforts to small and very small plants during the next year to promote food safety regulatory compliance and food defense. The following are the key strategies.

One-stop customer service: Develop a coordinated, easily accessible, consistent, and customer-oriented outreach program that provides small and very small plants with "one-stop" service for obtaining information (technical, grant of inspection, validation, etc.), technical assistance, and answers to achieve compliance and promote food safety and food defense.

Technical resources: Provide a full range of technical resources targeted to meet key needs of small and very small plants to help improve the quality of food safety and food defense plans. These technical resources are clear, easily understood, continually

reviewed and updated, meet rigorous scientific standards, and are accessible through the “one-stop” service.

Education/training: Provide access and resources to support ongoing teaching/education for small and very small plants, and ensure that employees and partners have training that equips them to effectively assist in outreach activities.

Partnerships: Develop and expand active partnerships with industry, academia, consumers, and federal, state, and international public health partners to support our outreach strategies.

Needs assessment: Use multiple strategies to conduct ongoing, regular activities to determine the needs of small and very small plants, and modify efforts to target the needs identified.

Evaluation: Establish performance measures for small and very small plant outreach that will be used for short- and long-term planning and develop methods to identify and evaluate outcomes of outreach activities.

Resource/budget: Leverage existing resources so that they are used efficiently and effectively, and demonstrate Agency commitment to support small and very small plant outreach efforts.

Correspondingly, the following deliverables are planned to enhance our outreach to small and very small plants.

- Establish a web page with assistance specifically designed to meet the needs of small and very small plants.
- Provide 1-800 number staffed with experts who can provide consistent answers to assist small and very small plants.
- Conduct a series of listening sessions with small and very small plants to get more details about their specific needs.
- Develop a clearinghouse to share frequently asked Q and As.
- Provide joint training sessions for small and very small plant employees, FSIS employees, and other stakeholders.
- Issue validation support, guidance materials, information on appeals, and supporting documentation materials written in plain language to assist small and very small plants.

Strengthening the technical assistance component of our regulatory program is not only a timely but also essential prerequisite building block to prepare for the implementation of a risk-based regulatory system. We believe that providing technical assistance early can eliminate the need to take regulatory action later. FSIS will continue to assess the needs of the small and very small plants as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the Agency’s outreach activities designed to meet those needs.

Questions for the Committee

What suggestions do you have for how FSIS, through the International HACCP Alliance, could locate industry representatives who are willing to share expertise and other technical resources and assistance with very small plants?

What suggestions do you have for how FSIS could obtain data on the types of support the small and very small plants need for their food safety systems?

What suggestions do you have for how FSIS could best work with a users group (consisting of all partners) to provide feedback on the usefulness of existing tools and services, to pilot new activities or materials, and to make recommendations on how to improve the outreach function to better meet the needs?

What other suggestions do you have for FSIS for strengthening our strategy for outreach to small and very small plants?

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