

Verona T. Gibson
507 Red Hill Road
Pickens, SC 29671

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FSIS Docket #99-062N
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service
Room 102
300 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20250-3700

RE: The Future of FSIS Veterinarians: Public Health Professionals For the 21st Century

To whom it may concern;

As a student who plans to attend a veterinary college, I wish to comment on the suggestions from the committee about the role of veterinarians with in the FSIS and other food safety organizations into the 21st century. I have several ideas about the proposed direction of the FSIS veterinarian.

The role of the FSIS veterinarian has great significance in the health of Americans and citizens of countries importing American meat products. The proposed action of eliminating the scheduling and routine management duties from the veterinarian's job description is very highly supported. Placing these responsibilities on the veterinarian shows a disrespect for their time and knowledge. Their efforts should be concentrated toward the hands on inspection and lab work necessary for determining the healthfulness of the meat or animal. Another area that needed attention was the slaughter facilities dealing in cull animals. These facilities need more veterinarians to assure the safety of the meat products being produced. The presence of the pathogens greatly increases the chance of disease and veterinarians are trained to deal with sanitation and containment. This an area where the veterinarian's knowledge can be utilized for the purpose in which it was imparted; public safety.

Many veterinarians leave private practice due to the high level of competitiveness between practices in one area. The recruiting and training of these veterinarians could greatly increase the productive ability of the FSIS. These are individuals who have treated and diagnosed many of the pathological processes that require the culling of an animal. The ability of these veterinarians to more easily and quickly detect diseased animals will only benefit the FSIS and consumers. Also, these government employed veterinarians have hope of advancement with in the FSIS organization under the proposed action. This could help lure more experienced veterinarians in to your organization. Expectations of stable, high annual incomes are exaggerated to those involved in private practice. With the guarantee of a salary, some veterinarians will

decide that the stability is preferable. The proposed mentoring program would also benefit those fresh from veterinary school. Chances to work with other experienced veterinarians in the actual work environment can persuade inexperienced graduates to join the team. One action I would suggest would be to promote your organizations to undergraduate students majoring in animal sciences and biological sciences. If these students are aware of your organization as they enter veterinary school, then they can better arrange the course load to prepare them in the fields you desire.

The section on veterinarian and other agencies partnering is most interesting. I agree that these agencies must have open lines of communication, but one important step has been overlooked. The farmer can greatly influence the quality and safety of the animal he produces. A relationship between an agent of the FSIS or FDA who is a veterinarian could help educate and encourage these farmers. If the system were set up and administered like the extension agent program, trust and respect can be gained. This respect leads to the better education of the farmer.

One of the most necessary provisions in this proposal is the identification and tracking aspect. If the tracking of large meat animals could be handled like that of poultry a huge step toward a safer product will have been made. Also, the tracking of pathological organisms, much like the CDC, could help identify at risk animals before obvious signs of disease are present.

Finally, the collaboration of the FSIS veterinarian and foreign food safety agencies is essential. In order for the U.S. to become a major exporter of meat products, other nations must view our product as being equal or better in quality and safety. This can be accomplished through open lines of communication with the appropriate agencies of other nations.

Overall, I believe this proposed action plan to be sound and to the benefit of the consumer. The greater respect of veterinarians and the knowledge they have acquired can only improve the support systems and focus the veterinarian's task load toward more scientific jobs. I would like to thank all the individuals involved in drafting this document. Their time and attention is appreciated.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Verona T. Gibson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely".

Verona T. Gibson