

VISION:

To eliminate all food safety hazards in foods provided through the USDA nutrition assistance programs.

MISSION:

To increase awareness, visibility, and impact of food safety on USDA nutrition assistance programs and represent FNS programs in the wider Federal and State food safety community.

Highlights of 2007:

I. Commodity Food Safety:

- Manage Hold and Recall Procedures
- Posting Non-Commodity Recall Bulletins on the Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) Home Page
- Commodity Food Safety Complaint System

II. Technical Assistance

- Reviewing Food safety Information in Child Nutrition Program Materials
- Resources for Residential Child Care Institutions to develop School Food Safety Programs based on HACCP Principles
- Organize and Lead CN Labeling Stakeholders Meeting
- Avian Influenza and Pandemic Planning

III. Outreach

- Regional Office Support on Recall and Food Safety Matters
- Cooperative Agreement with the National Food Service Management Institute
- Education and Outreach through Presentations
- Education and Outreach through Partnerships
- Education and Outreach through Publications

IV. Food Defense Activities

- Strategic Partnership Program on Agroterrorism (SPPA)
- Food Defense Surveillance Assignment (FDSEA)
- Table-Top Exercises
- Food and Agriculture Sector Specific Plan
- Guidelines for Food Recovery and Emergency Preparedness

Introduction:

November 2007 marked the three-year anniversary of the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Food Safety Staff (FSS) as a focal point for food safety initiatives that emphasize the Department's commitment to food safety and food safety education for operators and recipients of FNS nutrition assistance programs. In October 2007, the FSS joined the newly created Office of Emergency Management and Food Safety (OEMFS). This report highlights the contributions of the FSS to the mission of the Agency and the Department in 2007.

Commodity Food Safety:

Manage Hold and Recall Procedures:

The FSS handles food recalls of USDA purchased commodities for FNS Programs. To meet procedural requirements for 24 hour notification in the event of a recall, the FSS initiated the Rapid Alert System (RAS) as an integral part of the Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS). The RAS allows the FSS to disseminate hold and recall information to State Agencies through a call down notification system and provides a response form so the FSS can track the disposition of the affected product. In 2007, the FSS handled 3 administrative recalls using the RAS:

May: 1650 cases of beef stew (A590) were recalled from 2 states due to bulging and exploding cans from post-process contamination.

July: 80,000 cases of beef stew (A590) and bison stew (A611) from 44 states, 1 Territory, and the District of Columbia were returned to the vendor or destroyed in a precautionary recall, when products manufactured at the same facility were implicated in an investigation of botulism cases. The USDA-purchased beef and bison stew was not found to contain botulinum toxin.

December: 6,500 cases of potato rounds (A204) from 5 states were placed on hold after two samples from the same production lot failed re-inspection for odor, taste, and texture. There was a concern about the safety of the product but the determination was made that the problem was a quality issue not a food safety issue.

Posting Non-Commodity Recall Bulletins on the Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) Home Page:

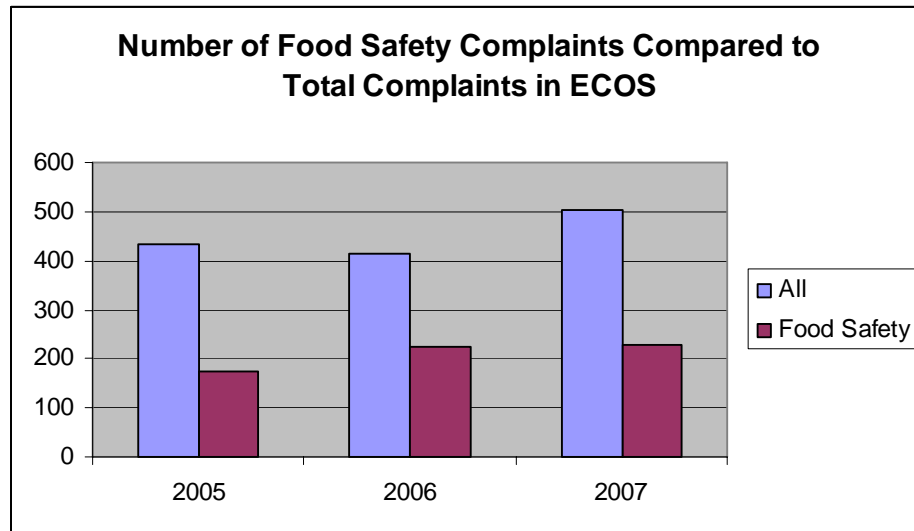
The FSS helps ensure that all foods served by FNS program operators are safe and wholesome. When the FSS is notified of significant recalls of non-commodity products that may have been procured by States or schools from commercial sources, the recall information is posted to the ECOS home page. ECOS users are given a summary and links to further information posted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). In 2007, the following recalls were posted to ECOS:

- Ground beef, contaminated with *E. coli*
- Tortillas, unidentified contamination
- Chicken and turkey pot pies, contaminated with *Salmonella*
- Canned beans such as green beans, lima, kidney and other varieties, contaminated with *C. botulinum*
- Beef Patties, contaminated with *Listeria*
- Frozen meat pizzas, contaminated with *E. coli*

Commodity Food Safety Complaint System:

The FSS monitors and analyzes complaints about USDA purchased commodities for potential food safety concerns. Complaints are entered into ECOS and automatically flagged for a food safety review based on the problem description. When a complaint is received, it is reviewed by the FSS to determine whether it is a food safety concern, or is part of a larger trend. If necessary, the FSS contacts the appropriate procurement and regulatory agencies, follows up with the complainant for additional information, and works closely with the Food Distribution Division's Complaint Team to ensure

resolution. Periodically, complaint data are reviewed for indicators of vendor performance; whether commodity specifications need modification; and whether and what food handling or safety messages are needed.



Technical Assistance:

Reviewing food safety information included in Child Nutrition Program materials:

The FSS provided food safety expertise to the Child Nutrition Programs and reviewed food safety information included in materials generated for these programs:

- Child and Adult Care Food Program Recipes – food safety section
- Child and Adult Care Food Program Recipes CD containing food safety information and resources
- Summer Food Service Program Handbook for 2008 – food safety section
- Menu Planner for Schools – food safety chapter

Resources for Residential Child Care Institutions to develop School Food Safety Programs based on HACCP Principles:

Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCIs) must develop Food Safety Programs based on HACCP principles. The FSS provided assistance to the University of Rhode Island and the University of Massachusetts in their successful bid for a USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service grant to develop materials for RCCIs. The project results will be available to inform the process of developing HACCP-based Food Safety Programs for RCCIs in other states.

Organize and Lead CN Labeling Stakeholders meeting:

The FSS led a project identified at the FNS Senior Leaders Meeting in January 2007 to assess options for the future of the Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program that would make the most efficient use of agency resources. The FSS created and chaired the CN Labeling Program Work Group, planned and conducted a Stakeholders Meeting, and coordinated the discussion of potential options resulting in a decision memo for the Under Secretary with a recommendation to address current challenges for the program.

Avian Influenza and Pandemic Planning:

To support the Agency's activities in the discussions on avian influenza and pandemic planning, the FSS:

- Reviewed State Pandemic Influenza Operational Plans
- Sent a representative to weekly Departmental level avian influenza meetings, keeping the Agency updated on new developments and voicing Agency concerns on the topic

Outreach:

Regional Office Support on Recall and Food Safety Matters:

Regional Office (RO) representatives join an FSS-led monthly conference call to share up-to-date food safety information; review commodity complaints from the previous month; and report on all food safety activities at headquarters, some of which involve RO participation, such as recalls or special projects. The FSS also sends daily food safety information bulletins; notifies the Regions of commodity and non-commodity recalls; and maintains a food safety mailbox to handle questions from the field.

In 2007, FSS assisted ROs in handling a variety of questions from States:

- The safety of bovine growth hormone in milk
- The safety of plastic cutlery manufactured in China
- A purported 'USDA/FDA Compliance Journal' being shipped to schools with billing included
- FDA warning letters to State warehouses regarding registration of food facilities
- An ammonia leak in a warehouse in Texas
- Alleged contamination of commodity salsa by a student

Cooperative Agreement with the National Food Service Management Institute

The FSS works with the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) on food safety education and training for Child Nutrition Programs nationwide. In 2007, NFSMI conducted the following cooperative agreement activities:

- held a meeting of food safety experts to review existing materials and provide recommendations for the Emergency Preparedness/Food Defense Network
The materials are currently under revision
- met with the Center for Educational Research and Evaluation at The University of Mississippi to plan a comprehensive evaluation of the food safety activities conducted under all Cooperative Agreements
- conducted food safety and HACCP training at State Agency and School Nutrition Association conferences/ meetings from October 1, 2006, through September 30, 2007 as follows: 36 sessions presented to 2069 participants in 12 different states

Education and Outreach through Presentations:

The FSS uses presentations at professional and educational meetings to get food safety messages out to FNS Regional and State partners and program operators. The FSS addressed groups across the country to promote food safety and food defense:

- American Commodity Distribution Association National Conference
- National Environmental Health Association Annual National Conference
- School Nutrition Association Annual National Conference

- Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools National Conference
- USDA Cooperative States Research, Education and Extension Service's National Research Initiative on Food Safety
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association Annual Conference
- Minnesota School Nutrition Association Annual Conference
- Illinois Food Safety Symposium
- California School Nutrition Association Annual Conference
- Five Regional FNS Meetings for States
- Institute of Food Technologists Annual Meeting - presentation by the Food Safety and Inspection Service on behalf of FNS to describe the FNS Strategic Partnership Program in Agroterrorism

In addition to presentations made by staff, the FSS expanded its outreach by sharing slides and scripts with a number of partners, including States and the network of Food and Drug Administration Public Affairs Specialists.

Education and Outreach through Partnerships:

Partnerships with other agencies and organizations help the FSS disseminate messages about food safety and food defense. In 2007, the activities were:

- Participated in the Annual Planning Meeting for the Partnership for Food Safety Education
- Helped sister USDA agencies answer public inquiries, such as a question posed to AMS regarding melamine in school lunches
- Participated in the Annual ARS/FSIS Research Meeting
- Staffed a booth twice on epidemiology and foodborne illness outbreaks for elementary school children at the FSIS Food Safety Education Summer Camp
- Distributed a selection of food safety materials to States at no charge
- Led the National Coalition for Food Safe Schools resulting in the reprint of the *Food Safe Schools Action Guide* for distribution at workshops and meetings
- Created an FNS food safety resource sheet for the American Public Health Association (APHA) Food and Nutrition Section booth at the APHA Annual Meeting

Education and Outreach through Publications:

The FSS includes food safety messages in newsletters and publications of partner groups. Titles included:

- "Establishment Number: The Key to Locating the Correct Product for a Hold or Recall," *School Programs Commodity Update*, FNS Food Distribution Division, September 2007
- "Holds and Recalls: The Importance of Tracking Food," *School Programs Commodity Update*, FNS Food Distribution Division, April 2007
- "What You May Not Know About National School Lunch Program Food Safety Requirements," *The Preventive Measure*, National Capital Area Environmental Health Association, September 2006
- "Food Safety and Food Defense for Schools," *ERCME* Express, Department of Education, Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCME) Technical Assistance Center, June 2006

Food Defense Activities:

Strategic Partnership Program on Agroterrorism:

The FSS attended Strategic Partnership Program on Agroterrorism (SPPA) exercises held in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), FSIS, AMS, FSA, States and industry to conduct in-depth vulnerability assessments of different food and agricultural sub-sectors, such as food warehouses and the food transportation sector.

Food Defense Surveillance Assignment:

FSS joined FSIS and AMS in an FDA project called the Food Defense Surveillance Assignment, which simulated a threat on the food supply and provided an opportunity for multiple agencies to work together to exercise systems related to preparedness and response to a credible food and agriculture sector related threat.

Table-Top Exercises:

The FSS participated in three table-top exercises.

- The Los Angeles County Health Department conducted an exercise involving terminal food markets and distributors and invited the LA Unified School District and FSS to participate
- The FSS was on the planning committee and served as an exercise evaluator for a school lunch based table-top exercise conducted by the Florida Department of Agriculture under a Department of Homeland Security grant
- The FSS planned and conducted a school lunch table-top exercise with the State Department of Education in Iowa and Des Moines Public Schools. This exercise is the first of a series that will lead to the development of a table-top exercise resource package that any State or School Food Authority could use to test their own food defense and/or emergency preparedness plans

Food and Agriculture Sector Specific Plan:

The Food and Agriculture Sector Specific Plan (SSP) is part of the National Infrastructure Protection Plan coordinated by the Department of Homeland Security. In December 2006, FNS completed its portion of the plan that described how food in our nutrition assistance programs is protected from intentional contamination when it is under our control. In 2007 the FSS solicited State input to the SSP and received information from eight States about their food defense strategies for the commodity foods under their control.

Guidelines for Food Recovery and Emergency Preparedness:

The FSS served on two committees of the Conference for Food Protection: the Food Recovery Committee and the Emergency Preparedness and Response Committee. The Food Recovery Committee revised and released the *Comprehensive Guidelines for Food Recovery Programs*, involving the collection foods from commercial production and distribution channels and their redistribution to people in need. The Emergency Preparedness and Response Committee revised the *Emergency Guidance for Retail Food Establishments*, providing recommendations on planning for natural disasters and other emergencies that have the potential to create health hazards. FSS staff contributions especially assured that both documents contained food defense information and provided valuable technical assistance for operators of FNS programs.

Projected Outputs for 2008:

- Commodity Food Safety
 - Develop guidance on commodity food inventory management and product tracking
 - Release updated web-based Hold/Recall Resource Kit and provide training through NFSMI
- Technical Assistance
 - Provide food allergy and anaphylaxis resources to schools and work with partners to develop instructional materials
 - Will develop an addendum on food allergies in the document *Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in the School Nutrition Programs*
 - Initiate a project to study proper cooling of foods served in schools
 - Respond to technical assistance requests by Child Nutrition, Food Distribution, and WIC program staff
- Outreach
 - Continue education (in conjunction with NFSMI) including presentations at conferences, meetings and workshops
 - Support FNS Regional Offices (presentations, requests, etc.)
- Food Defense Activities
 - Revise the *Food Safe Schools Action Guide* to include a food defense component
 - Conduct additional Table Top Exercises

Projects Beyond 2008:

- Increase education on food allergies and anaphylaxis in schools through partnerships
- Develop an educational campaign on the prevention of foodborne norovirus in schools
- Create guidance for schools on the safe handling and sanitizing of fresh produce
- Continue a project to provide guidance to schools on proper cooling of foods
- Coordinate with CDC on refinement of data analysis from eFORS (Electronic Foodborne Outbreak Reporting System) and increase reporting of school food-borne outbreaks
- Coordinate with State Extension Staff on a project to evaluate the *Food Safe Schools Action Guide*
- Develop and promote a recognition program for schools for food safety efforts
- Assist with transition of the Rapid Alert System to be a component of the Web Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM) system
- Develop a turn-key Table Top resource for State Agencies and School Food Authorities that would meet DHS criteria for grant funding