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Risk Based Inspection May Be Delayed

The new Risk Based Inspection (RBI) program of meat processing plants that was scheduled to get under way this month may be delayed until later this spring, or even perhaps this summer. The new policy, announced in late February, is designed to reallocate inspection resources by determining relative risk at each processing plant and reviewing how each plant is controlling risk in its operations, while continuing daily inspection at all processing facilities. Steven Cohen, a spokesman for the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) told the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* that the plan would be rolled out this spring at 254 pilot plants. "It's probably not going to be April, it's going to be in the spring," he said. "Even at the point at which the risk-based inspection is rolled out at these prototype locations, it's still going to be a fluid process because we're going to be evaluating, discussing with stakeholders and making refinements." According to a *Reuters* report, USDA Undersecretary for Food Safety Richard Raymond told a committee hearing that the agency would delay RBI implementation until June or July. A series of food safety summit meetings about RBI began last week and will continue through the month. A meeting on April 25 will focus on use of production volume data as a proxy for risk exposure and an April 30 meeting will discuss the potential use of industry data in the risk algorithm. A technical meeting on the expert elicitation process is also planned for a date yet to be announced, sometime after June. After implementation was announced in February, critics voiced concerns that the department was rushing a complex new system into place. Many processors were, and are still, unclear as to how the program will be implemented. While several industry groups have endorsed the plan, others question whether FSIS has gathered all the data necessary to establish the algorithms it will use to determine a plant's risk. Raymond said that he thinks the timeline will reassure those who want change to happen gradually. "I think we've been very deliberate," he said during a conference call with reporters, noting that the program has been in the works for more than 18 months.

FDA Proposes Revisions in Labeling for Irradiated Foods

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is proposing to revise its labeling regulations applicable to foods (including dietary supplements) for which irradiation has been approved by FDA. FDA is proposing that only those irradiated foods in which the irradiation causes a material change in the food, or a material change in the consequences that may result from the use of the food, bear the radura logo and the term "irradiated," or a derivative thereof, in conjunction with explicit language describing the change in the food or its conditions of use. For purposes of this rulemaking, they use the term "material change" to refer to a change in the organoleptic, nutritional, or functional properties of a food, caused by irradiation, that the consumer could not identify at the point of purchase in the absence of appropriate labeling. FDA is also proposing to allow a firm to petition FDA for use of an alternate term to "irradiation" (other than "pasteurized"). In addition, FDA is proposing to permit a firm to use the term "pasteurized" in lieu of "irradiated," provided it notifies the agency that the irradiation process being used meets the criteria specified for use of the term "pasteurized" in the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and the agency does not object to the notification. This proposed action is in response to the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (FSRIA) and, if finalized, will provide consumers with more useful information than the current regulation. Written or electronic comments on the proposed rule must be submitted by July 3, 2007.

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Key Senators Oppose FTA over Beef Issues

Senators Max Baucus (D-MT), Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Ben Nelson (D-NE) all said last week that they will vote “no” on the U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement as long as the beef access issue remains unresolved. The bilateral agreement just barely met a congressional negotiating deadline when trade deals on beef, automobiles, and rice were finalized. Senate Finance Chairman Baucus called the agreement “an entirely unacceptable outcome” and said he would block congressional consideration of the deal unless Korea lifts its ban on U.S. boneless and bone-in beef. He further stated that he made it clear from the start of these talks that there can be no trade agreement without full access to the Korean market for all of Montana’s beef exports, boneless and bone-in, and regardless of age. Senator Conrad, who serves on the Senate Agriculture Committee, which oversees farm and ranch policy, and the Senate Finance Committee, which oversees trade, also said he would continue to resist the agreement. Senator Grassley, ranking member of the Committee on Finance, said that the absence of an agreement to remove Korea’s ban on U.S. beef was problematic. And Nelson, who sits on the House Ag Committee, said there is no trade agreement without a beef agreement. U.S. trade officials say South Korea is likely to take steps to reopen its market after a meeting next month of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), when U.S. BSE status is confirmed as “controlled risk” by the organization. (USAgNet, 4/6/07)

FSIS Plans Educational Sessions for Small, Very Small Plants

FSIS will hold regulatory education sessions on April 18 and 24 for the owners and operators of small and very small plants in New Jersey and Oklahoma. The April 18 session will cover regulatory walk-through of sanitation performance standard regulations and food defense. This session will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 PM, at the Sheraton at Woodbridge Place Hotel, 515 Route One South, Iselin, NJ 08830. The April 24 session will cover a regulatory walk-through of sanitation standard operating procedures, hazard analysis and critical control point and rules of practice regulations. This session will be held from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM, at the Holiday Inn Norman, 1000 N. Interstate Drive, Norman, OK 73072. Online registration forms and information about upcoming sessions can be found at: www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Outreach_SVS_Plants/index.asp. To register by phone, call 800-336-3747.

Four Countries Ban Poultry from West Virginia

Cuba, Japan, Taiwan and Russia have all declared poultry from West Virginia temporarily ineligible for importation following the confirmation of low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) at a Pendleton County turkey farm. The countries will not accept any poultry or poultry products from the state. In addition, Hong Kong will not accept such imports from the county where the avian flu was found, said a spokesman for the Foreign Agricultural Service. The ban, which went into effect last Friday, includes live birds, eggs, poultry, all kinds of poultry products that did not undergo thermal treatment, as well as bird feed. According to the USDA, the strain in West Virginia is not the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus that has spread through birds in Asia, Europe and Africa. “Every indication is that the virus is consistent with low pathogenic strains of avian influenza, or LPAI, which are commonly found in birds and typically cause only minor sickness or no noticeable symptoms,” Dr. John Clifford said in a written statement. No new cases have been discovered since the initial outbreak, according to West Virginia officials, which resulted in the cull of approximately 25,000 birds.



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to be held at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, May 1-3, 2007, hosted by SMA and the Texas A&M Department of Animal Science. Registration forms are available on our website at southwestmeat.org, or by contacting the SMA office.

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China Inspects Wheat Gluten after U.S. Pet Food Recalls

China is carrying out a nationwide inspection on the quality of its wheat gluten after the United States claimed that the pet food at the origin of a number of cat and dog deaths used tainted wheat imported from China. "Sampling and examination are under way," Xia Wenjun, an official with the press office of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, told *Xinhua News Agency* on Friday. The probing targets melamine, a chemical used to make plastic and discovered by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the pet food recalled by Ontario-based pet food maker Menu Foods following a rash of animal sickness and deaths. "We will announce the results as soon as the investigation is completed," Xia said. The administration in charge of quality inspection and quarantine of imports and exports carried out tests Monday targeting aminopterin, a rat poison previously suspected of causing the deaths but later cleared by FDA tests. Xia said that the administration would stay in touch with the U.S. Embassy to China and take further measures based on developments in the United States. She made no comment on Xuzhou Anying Biologic Technology Development Co. which was identified by the U.S. government as the supplier of contaminated gluten. The company has insisted they never exported wheat gluten to the United States, but all imports traced to Xuzhou Anying will be held in custody at U.S. customs until investigations are completed, according to the FDA. Menu Foods commenced a North American recall in mid-March after an unknown number of cats and dogs suffered kidney failure and some died after eating their contaminated pet food.

Briefly . . .

Japan Suspends Imports from Cargill Plant: On Friday Japan suspended beef imports from another U.S. meatpacking plant, saying a shipment from the plant contained meat possibly violating a bilateral accord on beef trade. Cargill Meats Solutions, based in Wichita, KS, is the third major U.S. meatpacker in less than two months to inadvertently include prohibited product in a shipment to Japan and have imports suspended. Reportedly, 4 boxes of a 2 ton shipment of ox tongue from Cargill's Dodge City, KS plant may have been taken from cattle aged older than 20 months, according to both Japan's Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry and the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry.

OIE Launches AI Website: Key facts and figures about highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), the H5N1 strain or all other information relating to the disease can now be found on the new OIE Avian Influenza Portal. The portal is designed to facilitate users' navigation and search for facts on avian influenza in animals. Easy to navigate, it gathers all HPAI information available on the OIE website together in one place. The site provides the public with clear, concise and consistent information on the disease. Key topics covered are: avian influenza prevention and control, strategy for dealing with avian influenza, technical expertise and applicable OIE Codes /Standards /Decisions /Guidelines /Recommendations. It offers other useful current data like global disease updates, distribution maps, media resources and has links to other related web sites and resources. Access the website at: **www.oie.int/AI**.

Public Meeting To Address Codex Committee On Food Labeling: The Office of the Under Secretary for Food Safety, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently announced a public meeting to provide information and receive comments on draft U.S. positions that will be discussed at the 35th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Labeling (CCFL), to be held in Ottawa, Canada, April 30 - May 4, 2007. The public meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 10, 2007, 1-4 PM, in Room 107A, Jamie Whitten Federal Building, 1400 Independence Ave, SW, Washington, D.C. Agenda items and documents relating to the 38th Session of CCFL will be available on the Codex Alimentarius website at **www.codexalimentarius.net/current.asp**.

Mastertaste Launches Redesigned Website: Mastertaste, Inc., a global developer and manufacturer of flavors and flavor and fragrance bases, has announced the relaunch of its enhanced website at **www.mastertaste.com**. According to the company, the newly-designed website has a more user-friendly format and provides quick access to specific information on the company's wide range of product lines, applications, and technologies.

Beef Industry Finds Fault with Fertility Study: Beef industry experts are skeptical of a study indicating that sons of women who ate beef more than seven times a week during their pregnancies had a higher risk of fertility problems. The study makes "inferences on what I would consider fairly weak data," said a professor of animal science at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The study, by a professor at the University of Rochester, concluded that fertility problems could be caused by anabolic steroids used to fatten cattle, by pesticides and other chemicals that can be retained in beef fat, or by some other unidentified factors. More study is needed to draw definite conclusions, said a report on the study, which was published last week in the journal *Human Reproduction*.