

# SMA InfoMeat

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## FSIS Launches Web Tool to Answer Technical, Policy Questions

FSIS recently launched **askFSIS**, a new Web-based feature designed to help answer technical and policy questions regarding inspection and public health regulations 24 hours a day. The new interactive feature provides answers on technical issues in more depth than the standard list of “frequently asked questions” currently available through FSIS’ website. It allows visitors to seek answers on topics such as exporting, labeling and inspection-related policies, programs and procedures. Users can also register to be notified when answers are updated. **AskFSIS** was designed to serve a business audience, much as FSIS’ virtual representative, Ask Karen (**AskKaren.gov**), serves consumers who have questions about safe food handling and the prevention of foodborne illness. To access **askFSIS**, please visit FSIS’ website at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) and select “Help” from the global navigation buttons at the top of the main page. The **askFSIS** screen includes four tabs: “Answers,” “My Questions,” “Login,” and “Help.” The “Answers” tab is the starting point for keyword searches; it will also display a real-time list of the most popular topics. The “My Questions” and “Login” tabs are used to create an account for those visitors who wish to submit questions, check the status of a request, or revisit previously saved information. First-time visitors are encouraged to select the “Help” tab for tips on getting started. “This new Web-based tool will be especially helpful for owners and operators of small and very small plants and is another example of how FSIS is finding new and innovative ways to meet the needs of its customers,” said USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Richard Raymond. For assistance or details concerning **askFSIS**, send an e-mail to [askFSIS@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:askFSIS@fsis.usda.gov).

## FSIS Revises Approved Additives List for Meat, Poultry Products

Last Thursday, USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) amended Directive 7120.1 to revise the list of safe and suitable ingredients for meat and poultry products. This directive, titled, “Safe and Suitable Ingredients Used in the Production of Meat and Poultry Products,” identifies the substances that have been approved in the Code of Federal Regulations for use in meat and poultry products as food additives, in generally recognized as safe notices and pre-market notifications, and in letters conveying acceptability determinations. FSIS will continue to issue updates to the list as needed. For further policy information regarding the substances, contact FSIS’ Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff at 202-205-0279. The notice and directive are available on the FSIS website at [www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations\\_&\\_Policies/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&_Policies/index.asp).

### ATTENTION HUNTERS!

The Annual SMA Dove Hunt is scheduled for October 12-14, 2007 at the Janecka Ranch in Waelder, Texas! Limited slots are still available for anyone who is interested. Join us for a weekend of hunting fun featuring great food, refreshments, skeet, games and prizes!  
Call Phyllis at the SMA office or email [phyllis@southwestmeat.org](mailto:phyllis@southwestmeat.org) to sign up!

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## FSIS Announces Dioxin Survey

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) issued Notice 51-07 on August 15 to inform inspection program personnel that the agency, in conjunction with the Agricultural Research Service, will conduct the Dioxin 08 survey beginning September 4. This survey is scheduled to run 12 to 18 months and will gather data about dioxin levels in U.S. beef, pork and poultry. A total of 500 fat samples will be collected in federally inspected establishments and this data will be used to determine if dioxin levels in meat and poultry remain low and if steps can be taken to reduce dioxin levels. Samples will be packaged and shipped to the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) laboratory in Fargo, ND, for analysis and establishments will not be required to hold product pending results. Upon receipt of the notice and on the 15th of each month thereafter, public health veterinarians should check the list of participating establishments to determine whether plants in their scheduled assignments are included in the dioxin survey for the following month. The notice is available on the FSIS website at [www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISNotices/51-07.pdf](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISNotices/51-07.pdf).

## AMS Seeks Comments on Market News Program

The Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) published a notice in the *Federal Register* that it is seeking approval from the Office of Management and Budget to extend and revise its information collection system used to compile and generate the livestock and meat market reports for the Livestock and Grain Market News Branch of the Livestock and Seed Program. Under the market news program, AMS issues market news reports covering the livestock and meat trade, which encompasses a wide range of industry contacts, including packers, processors, producers, brokers and retailers. These reports are compiled on a voluntary basis in order to assist industry in making informed production and marketing decisions. Comments are invited on: whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency; the accuracy of the Agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; ways to enhance quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond. Comments must be received by October 15 and may be submitted electronically at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov).

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**Register now for "Developing & Implementing HACCP Plans for the Meat Industry"**

to be held at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, **September 18-20, 2007**, hosted by SMA and the Texas A&M Department of Animal Science. The course provides hands-on training in developing a HACCP program for all types of meat slaughtering and processing facilities.

**Registration forms are available on our website at [southwestmeat.org](http://southwestmeat.org) or by contacting the SMA office.**

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## ICE Issues Regulations on “Safe Harbor” Immigration Issues

On August 10, the Department of Homeland Security announced final regulations governing employer response to Social Security mismatch letters, and how such letters will be used in the future to establish employer knowledge of undocumented workers. Under the final regulations, ICE will deem an employer to have “constructive knowledge” of an employee’s undocumented status if the employer does not take certain steps in response to a Social Security mismatch notice (“Safe Harbor”). Given the fines and potential criminal penalties associated with being deemed to have knowledge of undocumented workers, we recommend that all employers immediately comply with DHS’ safe harbor procedures as set forth below.

1) Within 30 days of receipt of the mismatch notice, the employer should check its records to determine whether the mismatch was caused by a typographical, transcription, or similar clerical error. If so, the employer should notify the Social Security Administration of the correction.

2) If there is no clerical error, the employer should contact the affected employee and confirm the information provided. If the employer’s records are correct, the employer should advise the employee that he/she has 90 days to correct the mismatch with the Social Security Administration and provide an explanation to the employer.

3) If the employee does not correct the mismatch within 90 days, the employer must re-verify the employee’s employment eligibility by completing a new I-9 form. The employer may not rely on any documentation containing the disputed social security number. Employees who cannot provide appropriate work authorization should be terminated.

These new regulations are only the latest move to more aggressively enforce the immigration laws. It is reasonable to expect that both audits and criminal enforcement will be on the rise, thus making compliance a priority for all employers in the meatpacking industry. Members who might need assistance with policy changes on handling mismatch letters or would like a sample policy for review may contact David Barron of Epstein, Becker, Green, Wickliff & Hall, P.C. at 713-750-3100 or email him at [dlbarron@ebglaw.com](mailto:dlbarron@ebglaw.com). Many thanks to David Barron for providing this summary on employer response to Social Security mismatch letters.

### Briefly . . .

NAMP Invites SMA Members to E. coli Conference: NAMP will hold an *E. coli* O157:H7 conference for beef further processors on September 25, 2007 at the Four Points Sheraton near Chicago, IL O’Hare airport from 8 AM to 5:30 PM. The conference will focus on further processors such as grinders and those companies who produce other non-intact beef items (blade-tenderized steaks, marinated or injected products). Topics will include: writing purchasing specs that count; intervention technologies that work; regulatory compliance; testing successfully; lotting to prevent recalls; best practices from industry leaders; and *E. coli* O157:H7 and its impact on public health. NAMP has extended the member rate of \$399 to all companies affiliated with the Beef Industry Food Safety Council (BIFSCO), including SMA. For registration information, visit [www.NAMP.com](http://www.NAMP.com) or call 866-734-9407.

China Suspends Pork Imports from Some U.S. Plants: China has suspended pork imports from eight U.S. pork-producing plants over concerns about the feed additive ractopamine. This latest ban brings the total to 15 plants that have now been delisted to export meat to China. Ractopamine, used for the improvement of weight gain, carcass leanness and feed efficiency in animals, has been deemed safe by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, despite China’s ban on the drug. China is now in talks with the U.S. about revising possible tolerance levels for the drug, as Taiwan plans to do, despite domestic opposition by consumer groups and some politicians. Taiwan’s hog farmers also oppose the plan, claiming their business is at stake, as the lifting of the ban would allow U.S. pork imports to flood the local market. Taiwan’s Department of Health (DOH) and the Council of Agriculture (COA) plan to revise its standards to permit low residue levels of ractopamine in pigs and cattle and clenbuterol in cattle and horses. Cheng Hui-wen, director of the DOH’s Bureau of Food Safety, said the DOH is planning to adopt the standards set by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a body established by the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization, after reviewing the ractopamine residue criteria of international organizations and 24 countries where the use of ractopamine is permitted, including the U.S., Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

APHIS Lifts Trade Restrictions on N. Ireland: Last Friday USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) lifted trade restrictions imposed on Northern Ireland after foot-and-mouth disease was detected in England on August 3. Northern Ireland has been providing information to APHIS documenting that it took immediate steps to close borders and prevent the introduction of foot-and-mouth. “Based on this information, APHIS is confident that Northern Ireland is FMD free, and that trade can safely resume,” the announcement said. Trade restrictions remain in place for the rest of the United Kingdom.