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Email: phyllis@southwestmeat.org

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Edited by Phyllis Zimmerman

FDA Issues Final Rule on Animal Feed

A final regulation, barring specified high-risk material from cattle 30 months of age and older from being included in all types of animal feed, was issued last Wednesday by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The final rule, which becomes effective April 27, 2009, bans the following "cattle materials prohibited from animal feed" in all animal food or feed, including pet food: the entire carcass of BSE-positive cattle; the brains and spinal cords of cattle 30 months of age and older; the entire carcass of cattle not inspected and passed for human consumption, unless either the cattle is less than 30 months old or the brain and spinal cord have been effectively removed or otherwise effectively excluded from animal feed; mechanically separated beef derived from any of the above; and tallow derived from any of the above, unless it contains no more than 0.15 percent insoluble impurities. "This FDA action serves to further protect the U.S. cattle population from the already low risk of BSE," said Dr. Bernadette Dunham, director of FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine. "The new rule strengthens existing safeguards." This regulation finalizes a proposed rule that the FDA issued for public comment in October 2005. The final rule is effective 12 months from today to allow the livestock, meat, rendering and feed industries time to adapt their practices to comply with the new regulation. Under the new requirements, renderers processing cattle not inspected and passed for human consumption must provide FDA inspectors written protocols for determining the age of cattle and demonstrating the brain and spinal cords of cattle have been effectively removed. For a summary of the final rule by SMA's legal counsel, Olsson, Frank, and Weeda, P.C., email phyllis@southwestmeat.org.

Pork Producers Ask USDA for Help

In the face of rising feed costs and tightening credit markets and in an effort to stem mounting financial losses, the U.S. pork industry has asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture for assistance. Officers and top staff with the National Pork Producers Council met with Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer last Tuesday to urge him to take immediate action to address what now is a hog industry economic crisis, which likely will affect the broader U.S. economy. Over the past seven months, U.S. pork producers have lost more than \$2.1 billion. Due almost solely to a doubling of feed costs, producers now are losing \$30-\$50 on each hog marketed. Lenders are estimating that some producers could lose up to half or more of the equity in their operations by year-end. Economists have estimated that the industry will need to reduce production by at least 10%, a reduction of 600,000 sows, to restore profitability. That cutback could be costly, with less-efficient packing plants closing, less manure for crop fertilizer, a hike in pork retail prices because of a smaller supply, and lost pork industry jobs. Industries that benefit from pork production, such as feed mills and trucking companies, also likely would see job losses. Additionally, there may be agricultural credit problems as some producers default on loans. During discussions with Schafer, and in a letter presented to the secretary, NPPC President Bryan Black, a pork producer from Ohio, requested that USDA purchase an additional 50.5 million pounds of pork for various federal food programs. This would reduce the U.S. sow herd by nearly 163,600 animals. Black also asked that the secretary implement emergency programs and loan guarantees to help producers purchase feed, consider allowing early release without penalty of non-environmentally sensitive Conservation Reserve Program acres back into crop production and support pork exports through USDA's Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development Program.

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Agencies Plan Meeting on Foodborne Illness Outbreak Strategies

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) on Friday announced a public meeting co-sponsored by the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to discuss strategies on improved information sharing and coordination during multi-jurisdictional foodborne outbreak investigations. The meeting will be held on Thursday, May 15, 8 AM - 5 PM ,at the Renaissance St. Louis Grand & Suites Hotel in St. Louis, MO. The U.S. food supply is becoming increasingly complex and foodborne illness investigations often involve multiple agencies and jurisdictions. Significant advances in epidemiologic and laboratory surveillance have also allowed for more rapid identification of foodborne outbreaks that lead to coordinated investigations. Efficient information sharing and coordination among all stakeholders is critical to the success of these investigations. Local, state and federal public health partners, consumer groups, and industry are invited to share their perspectives on best practices and challenges to effective coordination during multi-jurisdictional outbreaks. The agenda and related meeting information will be available at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Meetings_&_Events/index.asp or you may contact Bonnie Kissler at 404-562-5940.

FSIS Posts Draft HIKE on Unloading Cattle

Today, FSIS posted a draft Humane Interactive Knowledge Exchange (HIKE) scenario on its website. The HIKE scenario, 03HD-08, "Cattle Unloading: Slips and Falls," is available for comments until May 2, 2008. The draft HIKE describes an off-line inspector at a large, high-speed cattle kill, watching the establishment off-load cattle. The cattle are not vocalizing and appear calm and the handlers are patient and are not excessively using hot-shots. The scenario describes how the inspector observes several cattle slipping and falling during unloading and how establishment personnel implement immediate and further actions to prevent such slipping and falling in the chutes. In this instance, personnel wash down the unloading chutes after every 3rd truck and make plans to install metal mesh on chute steps for additional traction. The HIKE describes how the inspector documents and verifies these steps as future humane handling activities. Comments that will assist in ensuring that HIKE scenarios are clear, understandable, and effectively articulate how to implement the specific Agency policy addressed may be submitted to Hike@fsis.usda.gov. View the draft HIKE at: www.fsis.usda.gov/FSIS_Employees/HIKE_03D-08/index.asp.

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FSIS Launches Podcast Service

Last week, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) launched a series of educational podcasts tailored to address food safety and education issues for consumers and other stakeholders. As a part of the Agency's ongoing outreach efforts to small and very small establishments, FSIS will initially focus on providing small and very small plant owners, operators and employees with important information through the use of podcasts. Subscribers will receive the latest additions through an RSS feed, or Web feed collector, with news and information about Agency work to ensure public health protection through food safety. FSIS podcasts will be short, factual audio and video files featuring scientists, policy experts and other specialists. "FSIS is making significant advances in food safety with information on food safety policies, programs and initiatives that are of value to industry, consumers and other stakeholders" said USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Richard Raymond. Podcasting audio and video files on the Internet allow free subscription and receipt of new podcasts automatically or selected individual files from a published list. To listen to individual podcasts or sign up for a free subscription, visit www.fsis.usda.gov. For assistance or details concerning FSIS podcasts, please send an e-mail to podcast@fsis.usda.gov.



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Mike Robinson	281-782-4450
Scott Ragsdill	972-948-7746

Briefly . . .

USDA Hosts Conference Call on Korean Export Verification Program: On Tuesday, April 29, 2008, at 12 PM CST, USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, Livestock and Seed Program, will conduct a conference call to discuss the export requirements for the Republic of Korea. Associate Deputy Administrator Randall Jones and ARC Branch Chief Jim will conduct the call. There will be a question and answer period afterwards. To access the conference, call 800-857-4235, with the Pass Code: 9026508, 10 minutes before the conference is to begin.

Agency Issues Notice to Synchronize Field Computers: FSIS published Notice 29-08, Synchronization of Field Computers, on April 24. This notice applies to all inspection program personnel who use the Performance Based Inspection System, the Electronic Animal Disposition Reporting System or the Daily Activity Report software applications. This notice outlines the necessity to synchronize field computers, provides instructions to synchronize field computers, provides notification of synchronization status, clarifies other actions to take in various circumstances and provides contact information for the FSIS Service Desk. To view this notice, visit www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISNotices/29-08.pdf.

Poultry 101 Slated for May: A Poultry 101 workshop will be conducted at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, May 20-22, 2008. Sponsored by *POULTRY* Magazine, the three-day, hands-on workshop introduces participants

to poultry production and processing factors that impact final product quality, safety and consistency. Topics will include history of the poultry industry, global and domestic marketing, growout fundamentals, slaughter and further processing, food safety, and meat quality issues. For more information, visit www.poultry101.com.

FSIS Publishes Directive on Scientific Seminar Series: FSIS published Directive 10,900.1, Inviting Non-FSIS Scientists for Office of Public Health Science - Scientific Seminar Series Presentations, on April 22. The purpose of this directive is to provide direction to Office of Public Health Science (OPHS) personnel on how to communicate with scientists from research, public, or private institutions and other government agencies to schedule presenters for the OPHS Scientific Seminar Series (SSS) Presentations. The evolution of science provides multiple opportunities to protect the public health and FSIS established OPHS-SSS Presentations to foster information exchange between FSIS scientists, other staff personnel and leading professionals in public health, food science, microbiology, toxicology, risk assessment, and medicine. The directive is available at www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/10900.1.pdf.

Shipping Error Will Not Affect Japanese Beef Trade: Japanese officials have decided a recent shipping mistake by National Beef Packing Co. was an isolated event and said the incident would not prompt Tokyo to implement a blanket ban on U.S. beef. National Beef's Brawley, CA plant was suspended from shipping beef to Japan last Tuesday following the discovery of a short loin in one box among a 700-box shipment. The short loin included a portion of spinal column, a prohibited specified risk material. John Miller, CEO of National Beef, said the box was not intended for Japan. The company, he said, "is cooperating fully with USDA and the Japanese government in the investigation of how this occurred and has taken appropriate steps to ensure that all future beef shipments conform to Japanese standards."

Farm Bill Conferees Reach Agreement: Key funding issues in the 2008 farm bill reportedly were resolved Friday in a break-through between House and Senate conferees. *Congressional Quarterly* reports the measure will total \$570 billion over 10 years. A \$400 million cut to direct payments will help pay for \$10 billion in new spending. The rest reportedly will come from the extension of customs user fees paid by importers, a move supported by the White House. Bush had threatened to veto both the House and Senate farm bill versions because of provisions that the administration viewed as tax increases. The final package, however, appears to contain no such provisions.