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FSIS to Host Meeting on Reducing *E. coli* in All Raw Beef

Last Thursday the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced a public meeting to discuss challenges and proposed solutions in moving forward to address recalls and illnesses related to *E. coli* O157:H7. "The last significant positive changes in the reduction of foodborne illness and positive product tests attributed to *E. coli* O157:H7 occurred early in this decade but we have since hit a plateau. It is time for another series of bold, strong moves based on knowledge and science to produce further significant reductions in illnesses attributed to the products we regulate," said Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Richard Raymond. "We aim to prevent and not just respond to illnesses, and consumers, industry and our public health partners are critical partners in our long term strategy and we look forward to our continuing collaborative relationship to ensure food safety." The public meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 9, from 8 AM to 5 PM, and Thursday, April 10, from 8:30 AM to 1 PM at the Holiday Inn Georgetown, 2101 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Washington, DC. The meeting will feature various presentations and panel discussions by FSIS officials, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a senior foodborne illness litigation firm partner, representatives from industry and consumer groups. On April 9, participants will explore the broad perspectives on the challenges of addressing *E. coli* O157:H7, including illness and recall trends, and progress on non-O157:H7 Shiga Toxin-Producing *E. coli* (STEC) since the FSIS Oct. 2007 public meeting on the subject. Specifically, FSIS will discuss growing evidence that may support a determination that raw beef products such as primal cuts and boxed beef contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7 are adulterated. Although this determination is not yet the official position of FSIS, the Agency recognizes that such a change would be substantive and would require stakeholder input. Therefore, FSIS is initiating a discussion at this public meeting and will present preliminary information to address the Agency's consideration of its position on primal cuts and boxed beef products that may lead to the conclusion that further risk mitigation actions are necessary. FSIS officials will also discuss the results of a checklist completed in November 2007 of approximately 2,400 ground beef suppliers and producers which will allow the Agency to better prioritize *E. coli* O157:H7 testing and related food safety assessments. Other Agency initiatives to be discussed include sampling programs, risk and food safety assessments as well as import food safety issues related to beef trim testing. Individuals are encouraged to pre-register to attend in person or via teleconference, and should visit www.fsis.usda.gov or contact Sheila Johnson at 202-690-6498 or by e-mail at Sheila.Johnson@fsis.usda.gov. The agenda will be available prior to the meeting on the FSIS website at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/.

FSIS Offers Regulatory Web Seminar

FSIS will host a regulatory seminar on April 16 as part of a continued effort for outreach to small and very small plants. This seminar will emphasize methods that small and very small meat, poultry and processed egg product establishments can implement to ensure effective sanitation and safer products for consumers. The seminar will be held 10 - 11 AM EST and 6 - 7 PM EST. To register by phone, call 800-336-3747 or e-mail questions to netmeetingseminars@fsis.usda.gov. Information about upcoming web seminars can be found at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Regulatory_Web_Seminars/index.asp.

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FSIS Issues Directive on Illegally Imported Product

FSIS published Directive 9600.1 - Illegally Imported or Smuggled Products and Reporting in the Import Alert Tracking System on March 27, 2008. This directive provides methodologies that the employees of the Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement and Review and the Office of International Affairs, and the Office of Food Defense and Emergency Response are to apply when surveillance or investigations identify meat, poultry or processed egg products from a foreign country that are intended to be or have been illegally imported or smuggled into the United States. This directive also introduces the use of the Import Alert Tracking System. The IATS is the FSIS's automated data system that principally tracks findings of illegally imported or smuggled products into the United States. The IATS will also track incidents involving Failure to Present, and any potential incidents of a food defense or of other concern involving imported meat, poultry, or egg products. This guidance cancels FSIS Notice 59-06, Illegally Imported or Smuggled Product, dated September 13, 2006. The directive is available for viewing on the FSIS website at www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/9600-1.pdf.

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NAFTA Partners Develop New Protocols for Cattle Trade

Officials from the United States, Canada and Mexico concluded a series of meetings last week that provided all three countries an opportunity to discuss issues of mutual concern affecting agriculture, food and trade. The U.S., Canada, and Mexico announced new protocols to harmonize standards for the export of U.S. and Canadian breeding cattle to Mexico consistent with World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) standards. "We mutually agreed on the importance of normalizing beef and cattle trade in North America consistent with the guidelines established by the World Organization for Animal Health," said Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer. The new protocols outline conditions for the export of U.S. and Canadian cattle to Mexico. Canadian exporters will need to obtain import permits from APHIS and SAGARPA, as well as a health certificate from CFIA. Shipments will be inspected by U.S. and Mexican officials. The harmonization of the standards in North America reaffirms the U.S. position that cattle can be traded safely when countries follow the OIE standards for effectively managing the risk of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), and further ensures that trade protocols for Canada, Mexico and the United States are consistent between the countries and with OIE. The protocols further a 2005 agreement to more effectively address the BSE risk in North America.



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Briefly . . .

FSIS Changes Scheduling Criteria for *Lm* Sampling: On March 21, 2008, FSIS posted on its website criteria used to identify establishments to be tested for *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Lm*) in food contact, environmental, and product samples under the Routine *Lm* Risk-Based Sampling Program. Under the routine *Lm* sampling program, a Food Safety Assessment is conducted in addition to sampling product, food contact, and non-food contact surfaces for *Lm*. The criteria provides an overview of the process for selecting establishments for sampling under the routine *Lm* sampling program and indicates changes to the program that is described in FSIS directive 10,240.5 - Enforcement, Investigations, and Analysis Officer Assessment of Compliance with the *Listeria monocytogenes* Regulation and Introduction of Phase 2 Of the *Lm* Risk-Based Verification Testing Program. Visit FSIS' website at www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&_Policies/Compliance_Guides_Index/index.asp to review the compliance guidelines.

APHIS Extends Comments on Transport Regulation Amendments: The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is extending the comment period by 30 days on a proposal to amend the Animal Welfare Act regulations for transportation of live animals excluding marine mammals. The proposed rule would remove the current ambient temperature requirements for various stages in the transportation of regulated animals. If adopted, it would replace those requirements with a single performance standard under which the animals would be transported under climatic and environment conditions that are appropriate for their welfare. In addition, the proposal therefore would make the issuance of acclimation certificates for live animals other than marine mammals unnecessary. Comments must be received by April 17 and can be submitted on the Federal eRulemaking portal at www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main?main=DocketDetail&d=APHIS-2006-0150.

FSIS Begins Posting *Salmonella* Performance Results for Establishments: FSIS begins publishing results of completed sample sets from its *Salmonella* Verification Program for young chicken (broiler) slaughter establishments by their performance category on March 28. The Agency intends to post updated results on or about the 15th of each month for young chicken slaughter establishments. This will include data collected through the end of the previous month. At this time, results are being published for establishments in Category 2 and Category 3. FSIS is not listing establishments in Category 1 and other establishments that do not have enough sets completed as required for Category 1. The Agency is looking at establishing a category for these establishments in the future and is also considering publishing category results for establishments in other product classes. For more information and to access the reports, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Salmonella_Verification_Testing_Program/index.asp.