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USDA Plans Rule Banning Slaughter of Downer Cattle

Last Tuesday Agriculture Secretary Ed Shafer announced a complete end to exceptions within the animal handling rule, so that the slaughter of disabled non-ambulatory cattle will be prohibited. The announcement follows Shafer's call in February for the Office of the Inspector General and FSIS to investigate allegations of animal cruelty and inhumane practices by the Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company in Chino, California. Evidence showed that the establishment did not consistently contact the FSIS public health veterinarian in situations in which cattle became non-ambulatory after passing ante-mortem inspection, which is not compliant with regulations. As a result, USDA called for the largest beef recall in U.S. history. "I am announcing that USDA will begin working on a proposed rule to prohibit the slaughter of all disabled non-ambulatory cattle, also known as 'downer cattle'. The current rule, which focuses on cattle that went down after they have already passed pre-slaughter inspection, has been challenging to communicate and has, at times, been confusing to consumers," proclaimed Shafer. "To maintain consumer confidence in the food supply, eliminate further misunderstanding of the rule and, ultimately, to make a positive impact on the humane handling of cattle, I believe it is sound policy to simplify this matter by initiating a complete ban on the slaughter of downer cattle that go down after initial inspection." This action is expected to provide additional efficiencies to food safety inspection by removing the step that requires inspection personnel to determine whether non-ambulatory cattle are safe to slaughter.

FSIS Provides Q&As for Food Defense Plans

FSIS will conduct a survey on August 1 to determine how many FSIS-regulated slaughter and processing plants have voluntarily adopted functional food defense plans. To assist plants in developing and using food defense plans, common Q&As have been posted to *askFSIS* on the Agency's website. Visit <http://askfsis.custhelp.com> and select "Food Defense Plans in FSIS Inspected Facilities." Through *askFSIS*, customers can receive information on technical and policy questions. Visitors can submit inquiries, check the status of a request, or revisit previously saved information. There are currently no regulatory requirements for an establishment to develop a plan; however, FSIS strongly encourages establishments to develop and maintain a food defense plan. The Agency is expecting to see a goal of a 50% adoption rate since the prior two surveys in which the adoption rate was less than 50%. Ultimately, FSIS is expecting industry to reach a goal of at least 90% of plants adopting functional food defense plans in order to stave off the agency's move forward with rulemaking that will mandate functional food defense plans. Visit www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Defense_&_Emergency_Response/Guidance_Materials/index.asp to review guidelines for completing a functional defense plan.



Register now to attend our 52nd Annual Convention and Suppliers' Showcase, July 16-19, 2008 at the historic Camelback Inn in Scottsdale, AZ! Convention registration packets are in the mail! If you haven't received one, please call the SMA office or download the packet from our website. Don't forget to make your hotel reservations early!

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S. Koreans Protest U.S. Beef

In South Korea, riot police beat and arrested several protesters early today during an illegal rally by hundreds of opponents of a beef import agreement with the United States that has raised fears of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Support for President Lee Myung-bak has plummeted amid mounting public concern. Last week, Lee issued a public apology, saying he had failed to appreciate the depth of public fear, but he criticized “unfounded rumors” over mad cow disease and ruled out going back on the deal. The Korean Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries planned to proclaim new conditions for the import of U.S. beef today. The announcement is expected to include safety requirements for U.S. beef agreed upon during Korea-U.S. negotiations on April 18, plus Korean rights to quarantine inspection reached during follow-up negotiations. Before the new agreement, only imports of boneless beef from cattle under 30 months old were allowed. The new agreement allows beef from cattle of any age, excluding specified risk materials (SRMs). The government claims if SRMs without age specification are found in the inspection process, the whole shipment will be rejected.

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Briefly . . .

Farm Bill Hits a Snafu: As expected, President Bush vetoed the Farm Bill last week, and as expected, the House of Representatives overrode the veto Wednesday. However, they may have to do it all over. If so, the 2008 farm bill saga may not be over until sometime in June. The House of Representatives voted to override the President's veto by a vote of 316 to 108, but due to a clerical error, Title III of the farm bill, the Trade Title, didn't get sent to the White House. It remains to be seen if the House and Senate may both have to vote on the Farm Bill again, presumably only to get it vetoed again by President Bush, bringing up another override vote. House Democrats on Thursday quickly passed a second, full version of the 1,768-page bill on the House floor, again by a veto-proof 306-110 count. The Senate, however, did not take up the House-passed bill and simply completed the override. Senators indicated all that needs to be done is to pass the missing title.

USDA Buys Lamb: Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer recently announced USDA's plan to purchase up to \$2 million of lamb which will be donated to child nutrition and other domestic food assistance programs. USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) purchases a variety of high-quality food products each year for distribution by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) for the national school lunch program and other programs. FNS will survey potential recipients to determine how much product will be accepted for shipping. AMS will seek the lowest overall cost by publicly inviting bids to supply the desired quantity and by awarding contracts to responsible bidders.

APHIS Proposes Changes to NPIP: USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is proposing to amend sampling and testing procedures for participants in the voluntary national poultry improvement plan (NPIP) to keep provisions of the plan current with advancements in the poultry industry. Specifically, APHIS is proposing to increase the number of approved tests for avian influenza (AI) used in breeding and commercial poultry from two to four. The two additional tests can provide highly specific results quickly, making them extremely useful as screening tests for AI and as part of an initial state response and containment plan in the event of an outbreak. Any positive test results would continue to be confirmed by federal reference laboratories. In addition, APHIS is proposing to increase the frequency of required AI tests to 90-day intervals instead of 180-day intervals, and expand the U.S. avian influenza clean classification to include other breeding flocks, such as ostrich and emu.