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Email: sma@tca.net
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Edited by Phyllis Zimmerman

USDA, Japan Meet to Discuss Inspection Revisions, Beef Trade

USDA plans to meet with Japanese officials today to discuss meat inspection rules and to press Tokyo to reopen the market to American beef, Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said last week. The meeting will follow an exchange of written questions by Japan and responses from USDA about revisions to inspection rules. Japan suspended imports on January 20 when its inspectors found forbidden spinal material in a shipment of U.S. veal. "The United States is eager to provide any additional clarification Japan may request so we can resume beef exports to Japan as quickly as possible," Johanns said in a statement. Deputy Undersecretary Chuck Lambert will lead the U.S. team. Other members will come from USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, Agriculture Marketing Service, Foreign Agricultural Service and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Johanns has repeatedly described the violation as a unique situation that occurred because of confusion over the rules. USDA has ordered meat inspectors to take additional training on export rules and will require double-checking of paperwork and shipments to Japan. Japanese officials say they want to be certain U.S. rules will prevent any additional violations. "I believe our report is thorough and actions address the unique circumstances surrounding this ineligible shipment," said Johanns. "Now my hope is that we can take the next steps toward resumption of normal trade."

FSIS Plans New Directives and Notices

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) publishes directives and notices to enable the agency to carry out its mission of protecting public health. Within the next month, FSIS expects to issue the following directives:

- Directive 5000.1, Revision 2 - Verifying an Establishment's Food Safety System This directive is being revised to remove instructions to enforcement, investigations and analysis officers (EIAOs) because the instructions for EIAOs are being incorporated into the 5100 directives series.
- Directive 10,220.4 - Using the FAST Antimicrobial Screen Test (FAST) to Detect Antimicrobial Drug Residues in Cattle and Swine This directive is being issued to replace the Swab Test on Premises in swine slaughter establishments. FAST is the preferred in-plant screen test for any slaughter class of swine or cattle. It also clarifies FSIS' policies for the use of in-plant residue screening tests for the detection of antimicrobial drug residues in cattle and swine.
- Directive 12,600.1 - Voluntary Reimbursable Inspection Services This directive describes voluntary reimbursable services available to facilities such as warehouses, cold storage facilities and off-premise freezers.

FSIS also intends to issue notices on:

- PBIS Profile Extension Instructions on Food Defense Plans - This notice provides instructions to inspectors-in-charge for completing the profile extension about an establishment's food defense plan.
- Donated Foods - This notice provides instructions regarding circumstances when establishments can donate food which is not in compliance with other consumer protection regulations.
- Availability of Cleaning Frequency Questions and Answers - This set of Q&As addresses inquiries from inspection program personnel about the circumstances under which meat/poultry establishments are able to employ less than daily cleanups in their operations.
- *Salmonella* Verification Sampling of Turkey Carcasses - This notice provides inspection program personnel who receive sample collection request forms (FSIS Form 10,210-7) with information and instructions for conducting the *Salmonella* verification sampling of turkey carcasses.

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FAO Reports Decline in BSE Cases Worldwide

Cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or “mad cow disease” worldwide are declining, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). They have been dropping at the rate of some 50% a year over the past three years, the Organization reported last Thursday. In 2005, just 474 animals died of BSE around the world, compared with 878 in 2004 and 1646 in 2003, and against a peak of several tens of thousands in 1992, according to figures collected by the Paris-based World Animal Health Organization (OIE). Only five human deaths resulting from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) were reported worldwide in 2005. All of them were in the United Kingdom, the country most affected by the disease, where nine deaths were registered in 2004 and 18 in 2003. Andrew Speedy, an FAO animal production expert, commented: “It is quite clear that BSE is declining and that the measures introduced to stop the disease are effective. But further success depends on our continuing to apply those measures worldwide.” FAO insists on the importance of a scientific approach to detect and control the disease, ensuring it is eradicated in affected countries, and kept out of unaffected ones. FAO, together with Swiss experts, has been running courses for specialists on BSE diagnosis, surveillance and prevention in the animal feed and meat industries. Also vital, said Speedy, is a tracking system that allows animals to be identified all the way from birth to shopping basket. Animal ID has been adopted across Europe, but has yet to be implemented in many countries.

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Briefly . . .

IKE Preliminary Scenario Available Online: FSIS has made preliminary Interactive Knowledge Exchange (IKE) Scenario 04D-06, Clarification of the Appeal Process for FSIS Personnel and Industry (example: Appeal Denied), available for comment through March 31. This scenario is the second of two that focuses on the appeals process. The scenario can be viewed on FSIS' website at www.fsis.usda.gov/FSIS_Employees/IKE_Comment/index.asp. If you have questions or comments regarding the preliminary IKE scenario, contact FSIS' Technical Service Center at 800-233-3935 or by electronic mail at ike@fsis.usda.gov.

FSIS Issues Notice Clarifying Squab Inspection: FSIS issued Notice 17-06 on March 22, to provide inspection program personnel with clarification on whether a squab that is shipped with the head remaining on the carcass is eligible to bear the mark of inspection. FSIS began mandatory inspection services at establishments processing squabs pursuant to the Poultry Products Inspection Act in April, 2001. A "squab" is a young pigeon from one to about 30 days of age. Squabs may be considered wholesome, not adulterated, and eligible to receive the mark of inspection when shipped with the head remaining attached to the carcass provided that the carcass has been satisfactorily bled and eviscerated including the crop. The establishment must also meet all parts of FSIS regulations (9 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 381) that apply to poultry and 9 CFR Parts 416 and 417. This notice is available on FSIS' website at www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&Policies/Notice_17-06/index.asp.

Officials Locate, Hold Calf of BSE Cow: The 6-week-old calf of an Alabama cow that was confirmed positive for BSE is now at a federal animal-testing lab and appears to be healthy. Alabama Agriculture Commissioner Ron Sparks said at a Friday news conference that the state now knows that the owner bought the animal about a year ago at an undisclosed state cattle auction. The calf will live under the oversight of officials at the National Animal Testing Laboratory at Ames, Iowa, as officials continue to search for clues to the mother cow's past. Partly as a precaution and partly for animal study opportunity, Sparks said, the calf will never be sold. As the offspring of a BSE positive case, the calf may help researchers understand the disease. Agriculture officials say there is no evidence that an ill cow spreads the disease either to its offspring or to other cows in its herd. "This is the first case we've had in the U.S. where we have a calf in custody," said Dr. Kenneth Angel, a USDA veterinarian in Montgomery. Officials were not able to trace live links in the only two other BSE cases ever found in the U.S. Another year-old calf traced to the Alabama cow is dead and was buried in a landfill by an Alabama livestock market in July, 2005.

Creekstone Farms Sues USDA: SMA member Creekstone Farms ® Premium Beef, LLC filed a lawsuit last week against USDA, challenging the Agency's refusal to allow the company to voluntarily test cattle for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) at its Arkansas City, Kansas facility. Creekstone is challenging USDA's claim that it has the legal authority to control access to and the use of the "test kits" needed to perform BSE testing. For two years, USDA

has repeatedly denied Creekstone's requests to conduct voluntary BSE testing. The company has stated that it believes U.S. beef is safe, but some customers want beef from BSE tested cattle. "If BSE testing is an additional attribute that our customers want, free enterprise should allow us to provide this additional element. In a country where free enterprise, satisfying consumers, and building businesses through thoughtful marketing and innovation are encouraged, I find it very difficult to understand why our government would not be supportive of this important effort," said John Stewart, CEO and Founder of Creekstone Farms. Currently, only USDA approved laboratories are permitted to purchase and perform rapid BSE tests.

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