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S. Korea Eases Guidelines for Imported Boneless Beef

In a press conference last Thursday, South Korea announced intentions to ease current sanitary inspection guidelines for imported meat. Lee Sang-kil, head of the Agriculture Ministry's livestock bureau, said that officials will only send back individual beef packages that contain bone chips, instead of rejecting whole shipments of beef because a few packages contain bone fragments. Last year South Korea sent back three shipments of U.S. beef totaling 22.3 tons based on the previous standard. Seoul banned American beef in 2003, after the first U.S. case of BSE was reported, but in January 2006 agreed to import boneless U.S. beef from cattle under 30 months old. "The latest move is unilateral and should help alleviate suspicions that South Korea is using the bone chip issue to unfairly impede legitimate trade," Lee said. Seoul also decided to lift its current import ban on meat processing companies that had sent packages containing bone chips. South Korean representatives made it clear that quarantine workers will continue to screen all incoming beef packages for bone fragments. Seoul's concessions still fell far short of Washington's demands. The U.S. has asked S. Korea to allow all boned beef not classified as non-specified risk materials (SRMs) to be imported and has also said that checking all beef with X-rays should be discontinued in favor of sample screening. The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) expert panel today classified U.S. beef as a "controlled risk" for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, so Washington will most likely exert more pressure on S. Korea to further open the market. However, Lee said that even if the U.S. got a negligible risk or contained risk verdict, which could technically allow it to export boned beef and even non-SRM internal organs, Seoul will insist on new negotiations so the U.S. will have to prove that its beef is safe for consumption.

FSIS Requests Revision of Information Collection for RTE Products

FSIS recently published a "Notice and request for comments" in the *Federal Register*, "Notice of Request for a Revision of a Currently Approved Information Collection (*Listeria* Control for Ready-To-Eat Products)." The notice informs of FSIS' intention to request a revision of "an approved information collection regarding *Listeria* Control for Ready-To-Eat products to reflect its most recent plant data, which supports a finding of fewer total burden hours." These are the "burden hours" required to collect information to meet the reporting requirement in the *Listeria* regulation that "official establishments that produce RTE meat and poultry products annually furnish FSIS with information on the production volume of RTE products affected by the regulations and the control measures used by the establishments." FSIS has estimated that it will take respondents an average of 8.3 hours to collect and report the required information. FSIS is also requesting comments on the following four questions:

- Whether the proposed information collection is necessary for proper performance of FSIS' functions, including whether the information will have practical utility;
- How accurate is FSIS' estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used;
- What are ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and
- What are ways to minimize the burden of collecting the information, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, or mechanical, or other technical collection techniques, or other information technology.

Comments must be received on or before May 7, 2007 and may be submitted in writing to the Docket Clerk or online at: www.regulations.gov. The notice is available at: www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FRPubs/2006-0044.pdf.

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FSIS Announces Availability of E-Form for RTE Products

Last week USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) released Notice 21-07, "Availability of Electronic Web-based FSIS Form 10,240-1, Production Information on Post-lethality Exposed Ready-To-Eat Products." This notice announces the availability of an electronic web-based form for online submission of the required annual production volume and related information required by the *Listeria* regulation from establishments producing post-lethality exposed ready-to-eat (RTE) product. This new form must be filed by affected establishments within thirty (30) days of the date on which FSIS inspection program personnel notify the establishment of the form's online availability. The notice may be viewed at: www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISNotices/21-07.pdf. Electronic Form 10,240-1 may be viewed at: www.fsis.usda.gov/Forms/PDF/Form_10240-1.pdf. The regulations on *Listeria* require that establishments which produce post-lethality exposed RTE products "provide FSIS ...with estimates of annual production volume and related information for the types of meat and poultry products processed...." 9 C.F.R. § 430.4(d). This information is to be documented on Form 10,240-1 which requires the following:

- Estimates of annual production volume of deli products and other than deli products;
- Classification by Alternative 1, 2 or 3 of reported products;
- Type of validated post-lethality treatment or antimicrobial process or agent;
- Expected log reduction obtained; and
- Frequency of testing food contact surfaces per line.

Initially, this form was provided in hard copy to be filled out by establishments and mailed in. Unfortunately, many establishments did not understand that this was, at minimum, an annual reporting requirement. FSIS believes that providing the ability to complete the form and submit it entirely online will aid establishments in submitting the form on a more timely basis. FSIS has revised the hard copy form to facilitate electronic filing and directions for completing the form online are included as an attachment to the notice. If an establishment chooses, it may still submit a paper form by mail. The form may be printed from the online version or a blank copy may be obtained by contacting the Technical Service Center (TSC) at 800.233.3935.

FSIS Clarifies TSC Service Expectations

FSIS recently posted a document to its website confirming its commitment to customer service and outlining what customers should expect when they contact the Technical Service Center (TSC) with technical questions. The document is available at www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/TSC_Response_to_Calls_&_Emails.pdf. The document outlines and clarifies a number of issues, including the following:

- 1) The TSC is part of the Office of Policy, Program and Employee Development (OPPED) and is located in Omaha, NE. The hours that the TSC staff is available to take calls or respond to e-mails are 6 AM to 5 PM Central Time, Monday through Friday.
- 2) The TSC may request and take steps to get both the inspected establishment and FSIS personnel on a call together to more clearly define the question, and for all relevant stakeholders to hear the answer.
- 3) The submitted questions and the TSC-provided answers will be captured as text data and will be analyzed for timeliness, completeness and accuracy.
- 4) The TSC will attempt to provide answers as quickly as possible within 24-48 hours.
- 5) The TSC will take certain management actions when TSC employees learn of instances in which inspection personnel believe they have been advised by their supervisors not to follow national policy. OPPED, including the TSC, continues to seek means for addressing the needs of stakeholders and for ensuring that food safety policy is understood and effectively implemented.

Does Your HACCP Plan Need An Update? Are You Ready for an FSIS Review?

Register now for "Beyond Basics: HACCP Plan Improvement Workshop for Raw and Cooked Product Operations," hosted by SMA, NMA, and the Texas A&M University Department of Animal Science, **March 29-30, 2007** at Texas A&M University.

Do you have decision-making documentation for your HACCP plan? Can you justify and defend your CCPs? Do you have all of your scientific supporting documentation on file? Can you support the frequency of your monitoring and verification activities? Is your inspector asking for information that you don't have? We can help you with these issues and answer your questions! This two day workshop provides a review and evaluation of your company's HACCP plan, with hands-on help to improve it. The registration form and course outline are available on our website.

Sign up today!

Researchers Claim Tea Wash Reduces Pathogens in Meat

Tea could be the wonder ingredient used in surface washes to improve the safety of ready-to-eat meats and vegetables. With processors looking for more natural ways to protect their products from pathogens, research completed for the U.S. Food Safety Consortium indicates that a scientific mixture of tea extracts can be used to reduce pathogenic bacteria in meats. Daniel Fung, the Kansas State University food science professor who supervised the research, said the study used extracts from green tea, or Jasmine tea, mixed in some wildflower dark honey. "Our results indicated that Jasmine tea with honey and green tea with honey had the highest antimicrobial activity," said Fung. The tests were first conducted in a liquid medium and found that the tea extract and honey treatments caused significant reductions of *Listeria monocytogenes* and *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria. Fung's team moved on to food, which can be a more difficult medium when seeking to cause the type of reaction among the compounds that will inhibit pathogens, but they reported good results. Treating turkey breast slices with combinations of Jasmine tea extract and wildflower dark honey reduced *Listeria monocytogenes* by 10 to 20 percent. Similar reductions of the pathogen were recorded when applied to hot dogs. They found the most successful reductions in hot dogs were in those that had been commercially treated with sodium lactate, potassium lactate and sodium diacetate. "In that type of hot dogs, it has much more suppressive effect than in some of the hot dogs without those compounds," Fung said. "There is a synergistic effect of the tea and honey along with those compounds with lactate already in the hot dog." A beneficial side effects of the treatment is shelf life. Fung noted that the experiments showed the hot dogs were still showing reduced levels of pathogens 14 days after the application. Fung now intends to examine possible applications of the mix as a surface wash for meat during processing. "We're thinking of using tea to wash carcasses because of its natural compounds," he said. "If you can use tea or honey to wash carcasses instead of lactic acid, you can use a natural compound on the surface of meat." (*Meatprocess.com, 3/9/07*)

Briefly . . .

Education Sessions Scheduled in Pennsylvania, Alabama: FSIS will hold regulatory education sessions on March 20 and 21 for the owners and operators of small and very small plants in Pennsylvania and Alabama. The sessions will cover a regulatory walk-through of sanitation standard operating procedures and the hazard analysis and critical control point and rules of practice regulations. The regulatory education sessions will be held at the following locations:

- Tuesday, March 20 - 6:30 to 8:30 PM at the Crowne Plaza Harrisburg, 23 S. Second St., Harrisburg, PA; and
- Wednesday, March 21 - 6:30 to 8:30 PM at the Doubletree Birmingham, 808 South 20th St., Birmingham, AL.

Online registration forms and information about upcoming sessions can be found on the FSIS website at: www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Outreach_Sessions_SVS_Plants/index.asp.

Cattlemen Approve Renewed Efforts on Superfund Clarification: U.S. cattle producers are applauding the introduction of legislation supported by 66 members of Congress Friday to clarify that livestock manure is not a hazardous substance under Superfund laws. In recent years, opponents of animal agriculture have suggested Superfund laws should be applied to manure from animal feeding, farming and ranching operations. (Superfund is the common name for the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, CERCLA of 1980, and Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act, EPCRA of 1986.) Eight Senators and 58 House leaders from both political parties are now saying that Congress never intended for America's farms and ranches to be slapped with liabilities and penalties under the Superfund law. Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Pete Domenici (R-NM) and Representatives Collin Peterson (D-MN) and Ralph Hall (R-TX) are leading co-sponsors of the Senate and House bills, respectively. These proposals will clarify that livestock manure is not classified as a hazardous waste under Superfund laws. (*NCBA NewsHub, 3/8/07*)

Cattle TB Detected in New Mexico: The New Mexico Livestock Board reported a confirmed case of bovine tuberculosis (TB) in Eddy County, and an investigation is being conducted by the New Mexico Livestock Board and the USDA, according to state veterinarian Dave Fly. The infected dairy cow was discovered during routine testing, known as slaughter surveillance, which is conducted at all state and federally inspected plants in the United States. "We are doing everything we can to minimize the impact on our livestock industry in New Mexico," Fly said. There is also a beef herd under surveillance in northeastern New Mexico for possible exposure to TB, Fly said. Officials and beef and dairy producers are concerned about the outcome concerning the new developments of TB. An outbreak could potentially cost producers an estimated \$3 million for testing. "We are working diligently to prevent a status change," Fly said. At a low level in the United States, the last case of TB was reported more than two years ago in New Mexico. Fly said that a management plan has been put into place and is being followed according to established rules in the Code of Federal Regulations.