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Japanese Inspectors Begin Tour of U.S. Plants

In compliance with a bilateral agreement, Japanese inspectors began a two-week tour of U.S. meat-packing plants today to examine the safety of processing methods of beef intended for export to Japan. If no problems are found, the plants will be allowed to shift to a system of random checks from the current system, in which all beef exports to Japan are checked. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns agreed to the inspections a few weeks ago in hopes that it will further open the Japanese market for beef trade. The inspections will cover 27 of the 35 meat-packing plants authorized to export beef to Japan and another plant that is scheduled to receive authorization, Japanese officials said. Japan, which banned imports of U.S. beef after the first case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in the United States was discovered in December 2003, resumed imports in December 2005, but reinstated the ban after a shipment allegedly violated the bilateral agreement for imports in January 2006. Japan lifted the ban again last July. U.S. beef exports to Japan have been limited to meat from cattle 20-months or younger, but Johanns plans to press Japan to remove the age limit. Johanns told reporters for *Kyodo News*, "We agreed to the 20 months just simply because we felt it was necessary to get some beef back into the marketplace." He added that Japanese beef producers could face losing exports to the U.S. if the trade rules aren't amended soon. The U.S. doesn't currently have an age limit on beef imports, but if it instated a 30-month age limit, "that would pretty well exclude Japanese beef from the marketplace here in the United States," he said. Other trade stakeholders would like Washington to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization, believing that the organization would rule against Japan since the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) has granted the U.S. a "controlled risk" status for BSE. Johanns fully expects that if no safety problems are found during the inspections, Japan and the United States will launch negotiations on easing the age limit.

FSIS Issues Directive on Use of Non-FSIS Lab Results

FSIS issued Directive 10,000.1 on May 11, to describe the decision-making process the agency uses when determining whether it is appropriate to accept results from a non-FSIS laboratory. This Directive "seems" to replace expired Notice 54-05, "Policy on Use of Results from Third Party Laboratories," though this is not indicated in the Directive. The directive covers results from State and local government laboratories, academic laboratories and private sector laboratories. Periodically, results from non-FSIS laboratories are presented to FSIS, such as from outbreak or illness investigations. If FSIS decides to accept the results from the non-FSIS laboratory, it may take action (e.g., request a recall or detain product) based on those results. If the agency decides not to accept the results, it still may collect a sample of the product in question for testing in an FSIS laboratory. These verification samples would be from the same lot code, as well as collected at the same location, as the sample held by the non-FSIS laboratory if possible. FSIS notes that it may still take action against a product based on "available epidemiological or other evidence" indicating the product is adulterated. All questions regarding the Directive are to be referred to the Technical Service Center at: 800-233-3935. Directive 10,000.1 is available on the FSIS website at www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/10000.1.pdf.

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USDA Reports on NAIS Pilot Projects

Last week the USDA published a final report on pilot projects conducted throughout 2004 to test technologies and procedures recommended for use with the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). Many of the projects tested the system in real-world scenarios, integrating animal identification and movement reporting into everyday commerce. The results provided valuable information about the day-to-day use of animal identification and tracing technology. "The pilot projects demonstrate that NAIS will work well and greatly benefit America's producers. These concrete examples of the system's capabilities, tried and proven in the field, are a critical step forward in our efforts to implement this important program," said Bruce Knight, undersecretary of USDA's marketing and regulatory programs mission area. Some of the key lessons learned from the projects included: the retention rate of radio frequency identification (RFID) tags was much higher than anticipated; existing animal health and marketing programs can be an effective, producer-friendly means of collecting data; workable options are available for producers who want to identify their animals electronically without investing in reader equipment; use of electronic identification allows for more accurate and efficient recordkeeping; the use of RFID at auction markets can improve animal welfare and human safety; and identification used for NAIS can support other programs, including value-added opportunities. USDA provided approximately \$6.6 million in Commodity Credit Corporation funds for the projects in 2004. These initial 16 projects represented the first stage of the NAIS pilot project program. The program supports the states and tribes in carrying out research and field trials that resolve questions and concerns about NAIS processes, technologies and costs. Several additional field trial projects, funded with fiscal year 2005 monies, are now underway to provide more statistical comparisons of technologies and more clearly define implementation costs for NAIS. More information on the findings from the 2004 pilot projects, as well as a description of current efforts, is available in the Pilot Project Report. The report can be accessed on USDA's NAIS website at www.usda.gov/nais. Click on the "NAIS Library" function in the top toolbar and scroll down to the "NAIS Plans and Reports" link.

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to attend SMA's 51st Annual Convention & Suppliers' Showcase, July 18-21, 2007 at the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort in Bastrop, Texas! Hotel reservations are available by calling 512-308-1234 or accessing the link on our website!

FSIS Proposes Rule on Chilean Export Eligibility

FSIS published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* on May 10 titled, Eligibility of Chile to Export Poultry and Poultry Products to the United States: Proposed Rule Comment Period Extension and Notice of New Information. The agency is providing additional information about the basis on which it has tentatively concluded that Chile's inspection system for poultry and poultry products is equivalent to that of the U.S. The initial proposed rule, published February 26, proposed to add Chile to the list of countries eligible to export poultry and poultry products to the United States. A comment on the proposal noted a deficiency that FSIS found in its onsite audit of Chile's inspection system and questioned how, given that deficiency, FSIS could find Chile's system equivalent. The agency is addressing this concern in the May 10 proposed rule. FSIS is accepting comments until May 25 through the Federal eRulemaking Portal at www.regulations.gov or by email at FSIS.RegulationsComments@usda.gov. The proposed rule can be viewed at www.fsis.usda.gov/Frame/FrameRedirect.asp?main=http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FRPubs/2007-0016.htm.

Texas Senate Passes Amended Bill to Allow Horse Slaughter

Earlier this year the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that a 1949 Texas law originally intended to prevent beef processors from adulterating their product with horsemeat to still be in effect. The 58-year-old law made it illegal to process horsemeat for human consumption. The result stopped horsemeat processing at the two Texas horse processing plants in Texas and the availability of a humane end-of-life option for unwanted horses. After the ruling, however, both houses of the Texas State Legislature introduced legislation that would amend or repeal that law so that, if passed, the horse processing plants located in Texas could resume offering federally supervised humane euthanasia for unwanted horses throughout the U.S. Last week, a bill amended by Senator Glenn Hegar (R-Katy) that would allow horse processing plants to resume operation, unanimously passed in the Texas Senate to advance to the Texas House. While the Texas House has yet to vote, animal rights groups are increasing their efforts to convince Texas legislators that horse slaughter should not be a humane end-of-life option available to livestock owners. We hope that our Texas members will take the time to contact their representatives and ask them to support legislation that would allow the horse processing plants to resume business and therefore reinstate a humane end-of-life option for unwanted horses. Talking points can be found at www.commonhorsesense.com. To find out how to contact your representatives, visit www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/.

Briefly . . .



Yarborough Receives Community Recognition for Volunteerism: SMA Vice Chairman Bobby Yarborough and seven others were honored as Volunteer Activists at the annual luncheon benefitting the Baton Rouge Speech and Hearing Foundation on May 10, 2007. Each year the Foundation honors people in the Baton Rouge community who have volunteered their time and services to help local organizations and churches. Yarborough has given 5 years of service to the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, most recently as the Past Chairman of the Board. He's been an active board member of the Greater Baton Rouge Boys & Girls Club since 1997, and of the Academic Distinction fund, having served as Chairman for both. He is also active with the Capital Area YMCA and Family Road, a non-profit family outreach program. Congratulations, Bobby!

FAPC Offers Allergen Workshop: The Food & Agricultural Products Center at Oklahoma State University is offering a Food Allergen Workshop June 19, 2007 in Stillwater, OK. The workshop will identify the basics of food allergens and give food manufacturers the information they need to control food allergen issues at their processing plant. Topics include allergen control strategies, recommendations on allergen recalls and labeling laws, and knowledge of verification techniques and allergen assay test kits. For more information and to register, visit the FAPC website at www.fapc.biz/PAGES/foodallergen.htm.

FDA Finds Chinese Food Producers Closed: American inspectors who were in China last week to investigate the two companies that exported tainted pet food ingredients found that the suspect facilities had been hastily closed down and cleaned up. Deputy director of the Food and Drug Administration's office of international programs Walter Batts was quoted as saying, "There is nothing to be found. They are essentially shut down and not operating." Word of the American team's inability to conduct a firsthand inspection came as investigators in this country learned that as many as 198 U.S. fish farms and hatcheries may have received fish feed contaminated with the chemical melamine, which came from the same two Chinese companies. (*Rick Weiss, Washington Post, 5/11/07*)