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Agriculture Secretary Johanns Resigns

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns resigned last week and on Thursday announced his plans to run for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by retiring Republican Chuck Hagel from Nebraska. He delivered a farewell speech to USDA employees on September 20, speaking of his pride in the people and history of the Department of Agriculture and his hope for the future. "The decision to leave this post has not been an easy one," Johanns said. "I grew up with farmers and ranchers as my childhood heroes and my mentors. Representing them in Washington has been a great privilege." Johanns was sworn in January 21, 2005, as the 28th Secretary of the Department of Agriculture after serving as Nebraska's 38th governor. During his time in office, he worked to re-open international trade markets to U.S. beef after the 2003 bovine spongiform encephalopathy scare, aided producers by providing timely assistance after the hurricane season of 2005 and worked to educate and prepare the country for a potential avian influenza epidemic. "Serving in this position really fulfilled the dreams of this farm boy," Johanns said. "Growing up I didn't know the names of the other Cabinet members, but I knew the name of the Secretary of Agriculture." Johanns swore Charles F. "Chuck" Conner, deputy secretary, in as acting secretary of agriculture. Conner has served as deputy secretary of agriculture since May 2, 2005.

FSIS Issues Directive on Post-mortem Livestock Inspection

Last week USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) issued FSIS Directive 6100.2, Post-mortem Inspection of Livestock. This Directive provides instructions to FSIS personnel on how to inspect livestock after slaughter (postmortem), dispositions for livestock post-mortem, and how to document the post-mortem findings. Additionally, the Directive officially cancels portions of the Meat and Poultry Inspection Manual addressing postmortem inspection, as well as FSIS Directive 6200.1. The Directive provides the specific inspection procedures for all species and all carcass parts. Inspection program personnel are instructed to evaluate the carcass and parts for signs of inflammation, pathology, cysts, parasites, or other signs of disease as well as sanitary dressing defects. Additionally, in the case of cattle, they are to inspect for identifiable specified risk materials (SRMs). The Public Health Veterinarian (PHV) is critical in determining dispositions for FSIS. PHVs conduct the final examination on any carcasses or parts held for disposition and are instructed to use a systematic approach in making the disposition. The PHV also renders disposition for carcasses with potential residue violations, and has responsibility to evaluate livestock for any potential foreign animal diseases and reportable diseases. The PHV examines all livestock carcasses showing abnormalities that inspection program personnel have retained at post-mortem inspection and examines and inspects all "U.S. Suspect" animals identified on ante-mortem inspection. The PHV is also responsible for maintaining the daily record of the ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection findings. They are expected to document the number of animals that were inspected as "U.S. Suspects" based on findings at ante-mortem inspection, as well as the findings at post-mortem inspection on these individual animals. The findings at post-mortem inspection are to be documented, especially regarding all condemned carcasses, including the specific reason for condemnation. In addition, PHVs are expected to collect all identifying information associated with the respective animals for the records (e.g., ear tags, back tags, etc.). This Directive is available at: www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/6100.2.pdf.

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USDA Unveils New Web Portal for Small Processors

USDA has unveiled a new Internet resource to help smaller companies answer food safety questions and help food processors make science-based food production decisions. The Predictive Microbiology Information Portal (PMIP) was developed by scientists with Agricultural Research Service (ARS) at Wyndmoor, PA, working with colleagues at FSIS, Rutgers University and Decisionalysis Risk Consultants, Inc. in Canada. "Scientists, food safety risk managers, researchers and government decision-makers can use this access to predictive modeling tools and food microbiology information," said Agricultural Research Service Administrator Edward B. Knipping. "The portal is geared towards small and very small processors, but the information collected will benefit companies of all sizes." "This partnership builds on our extensive efforts to provide more resources and better tools to small and very small plants so they can enhance the safety of their products," said FSIS Administrator Al Almanza. ARS and FSIS colleagues met with many industry members to tailor the Web portal to their diverse needs in providing safe and wholesome products to consumers. Currently, PMIP offers information on research, regulations and resources related to *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods, the prototype identified for the project by FSIS. In the coming months, it will be expanded to include other pathogen and food combinations. A searchable database allows users to find information that can also be used by food processors to develop plans for hazard analysis and critical control point, to ensure the safety of food processes. FSIS will also provide a link to the portal to facilitate access by the meat and poultry industry, especially small and very small plants. The portal is available at www.ars.usda.gov/naa/errc/mfsru/portal.

FSIS, ARS Use Data to Bridge *Salmonella* Gap

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has recently taken two major steps to close the gap that hinders attribution between human illnesses and the raw products regulated by the agency, particularly with *Salmonella*. FSIS and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) have strengthened their data sharing relationship through a cooperative agreement finalized August 27. This agreement ensures that identifying information on *Salmonella* isolates that FSIS collects are compared against information about isolates associated with human illness in PulseNet, a database maintained by CDC. The isolates FSIS provides for comparison are primarily those collected for pathogen reduction/HACCP verification testing of raw classes of products, such as, broilers, turkeys and ground beef. Under

the agreement, FSIS will be able to routinely access this data for all isolates maintained by ARS. The data would also be available in a timeframe rapid enough to be relevant to in-plant and public health investigations. These changes are expected to play a significant role in identifying whether products regulated by FSIS contributed to reported human illnesses. Improved access to subtyping information should enable FSIS to offer more assistance to its public health partners, to take swifter regulatory action to protect consumers and to increase efficiency in detecting clusters or outbreaks of foodborne illness.

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Welcome, New Member!

**SMA is proud to introduce
our newest member:**

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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, November 1-2, 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!

Briefly . . .

Legislation on Imported Drugs, Food Introduced: Representative John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, recently released draft legislation aimed to strengthen the U.S. system for ensuring the safety of imported food and drugs. The legislation would create user fees on imported food and drug shipments and would use the funds to hire additional personnel at both the U.S. border and FDA labs to increase inspections. It would also require labels for meat and poultry packaging utilizing reduced oxygen formats, limit ports where food can be imported to 13 locales in close proximity to FDA labs, require country of origin labeling, and provide for mandatory recall authority. H.R. 3610, The Food and Drug Import Safety Act of 2007, is scheduled for a committee hearing on Wednesday.

U.S. Study Reveals Small Sales Impact from BSE: Federal researchers analyzing consumer purchase data conclude that reports of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) had little effect on domestic beef sales. USDA's Economic Research Service reports that cases reported three years ago involving animals from Canada and Washington state with BSE did not devastate beef markets. Consumers' knowledge of the disease increased, but research into their purchasing habits show there was not a corresponding decrease in beef consumption beyond a brief period. Conflicting with consumer surveys, food-purchase data reveal that the response of U.S. consumers to the 2003 discovery of BSE in two North American cows was limited and dissipated within two weeks, according to researchers Fred Kuchler and Abebayehu Tegene. The researchers said that purchase data are a more reliable source of information on consumers' risk perceptions than consumer surveys. Some U.S. cattle industry spokesmen are not surprised by the findings. "That would be consistent with what we've found in our consumer research," said Joe Schuele of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

FSIS Requests Revision of Currently Approved Information Collection: FSIS issued a *Federal Register* notice on September 20 titled, Notice of Request for a Revision of a Currently Approved Information Collection (Application for Inspection, Accreditation of Laboratories, and Exemptions). In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regulations, the notice announces the agency's intention to request a revision of an approved information collection concerning the regulatory requirements for application for inspection, accreditation of laboratories and exemptions because of revised estimates that support a finding of fewer total burden hours. The agency is accepting comments through the Federal eRulemaking Portal at www.regulations.gov and by e-mail at FSIS.RegulationsComments@usda.gov. This notice is available at www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&Policies/index.asp.

Committee Approves Beef Checkoff Initiatives For 2008: The Beef Promotion Operating Committee this week funded a total of 42 program proposals with beef checkoff dollars for Fiscal 2008. At the same time, however, a tight budget forced the committee to reject more than \$1.8 million in proposals to stay within the Cattlemen's Beef Board's (CBB) \$46.8 million national program budget for the coming year. The plan of work funds promotion, research and information programs and is designed to build demand for beef using the checkoff funds remitted to the CBB. The plan still must be approved by USDA. The approved checkoff plan of work for CBB during fiscal 2008 includes: more than 22.8 million for promotion efforts; about \$7.4 million for research projects focused on a variety of critical issues, including beef safety research, product enhancement research, nutrition research, and market research; \$6.3 million for consumer information programs; more than \$2.4 million for industry information projects, including beef, veal and dairy-beef quality assurance programs; about \$5.25 million for foreign marketing efforts managed by the U.S. Meat Export Federation; and more than \$2.3 million for producer communications.