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FSIS Posts Support Reports for Risk-Based Inspection System

On Friday, FSIS posted two reports detailing the scientific support for their proposed Public Health Risk-Based Inspection System for processing and slaughter establishments. The reports were provided at the National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection meeting held in February 2008. One report discussed the proposed system for all processing and slaughter establishments and the other report detailed the system specifically for young chicken slaughter establishments. FSIS has revised the reports based upon comments from the committee, stakeholders, and peer reviewers. The revised technical report for all processing and slaughter establishments is now available at www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&Policies/National_Advisory_Committee_on_Meat_&Poultry/index.asp. The Agency plans to make the revised poultry slaughter report available on April 25, 2008. Response to comment documents have been developed to accompany each of the revised reports. FSIS will continue to refine the proposed within establishment component of the Public Health Risk-Based Inspection System by working with stakeholders to carry out a methods evaluation. In addition, FSIS posted the Audit Report on Issues Impacting the Development of Risk Based Inspection at Meat and Poultry Establishments. This report presents the results of the audit conducted by the Office of the Inspector General, US Department of Agriculture.

FSIS Issues Notice Outlining Changes for Contacting PDD

FSIS published Notice 26-08 - Contacting the Policy Development Division (formerly the Technical Service Center) on April 16. This notice provides an update on recent changes that have occurred in the Office of Policy and Program Development. In particular, the notice informs customers on how they can contact the Policy Development Division (PDD), formerly known as the Technical Service Center. The changes discussed in this notice will improve and expedite the customer's experience with PDD. PDD answers technical questions related to general domestic inspection policies and on FSIS issuances, such as directives, notices, and IKEs. Constituents with questions can reach PDD toll-free at 800-233-3935. Callers with labeling and sampling questions should be aware that the Labeling and Program Delivery Division in Washington, D.C. now responds to questions concerning labeling, standards of identity, and use of ingredients and the Risk Management Division in Washington, D.C. now responds to questions regarding sampling programs and sampling methods. To provide the best possible service, PDD offers another resource called **askFSIS**. This tool is a new web-based system where patrons may submit questions concerning a variety of issues from export requirements to food defense. With this function, PDD can provide timely and accurate responses to the questions received. To access this tool, go to askfsis.custhelp.com.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW

to attend SMA's 52nd Annual Convention & Suppliers' Showcase, July 16-19, 2008 at the Camelback Inn in Scottsdale, AZ! Hotel reservations are available by calling **480-948-1700** or accessing the link on our website!



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S. Korea Lifts Ban on U.S. Beef

On Friday South Korea agreed to resume beef imports from the United States that were halted in 2003 by concerns over BSE. The decision removed a key dispute between the two allies, hours before President Bush was to meet South Korea's new president, Lee Myung-bak, in Washington to discuss free trade and North Korea. The deal also clears an important obstacle to Congressional support for a wider free trade deal that the Bush administration has struck with South Korea. The agreement to allow American beef imports, which is unpopular among South Korean farmers, will take effect in mid-May. The new protocol defines conditions for importation of U.S. beef to South Korea and provides for a full reopening of the market. It is fully consistent with OIE guidelines and will permit all U.S. beef and beef products from cattle of all ages to be exported to Korea, with appropriate removal of Specified Risk Materials (SRMs) as defined by the OIE, while guaranteeing commercial viability for U.S. industry. Prior to the ban, S. Korea was the third-largest export market for U.S. beef and beef products. It partially reopened its market to deboned beef from cattle less than 30 months of age in January 2006, but this reopening was subject to several interruptions and the market has been effectively closed since October 2007.

FSIS Offers Regulatory Education Sessions in NC, MI

As part of the initiative to enhance outreach to assist small and very small plants, FSIS is holding a series of regulatory education workshops that will cover *E. coli* O157:H7 Prerequisite Programs and the following notices:

- 65-07, Notice of Reassessment for *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 Control and Completion of a Checklist for all Beef Operations;
- 66-07, Multiple Follow-Up Sampling After FSIS Positive *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 Results; and
- 68-07, Routine Sampling and Testing of Raw Ground Beef Components Other Than Trim and Imported Raw Ground Beef Components for *Escherichia coli* O157:H7. One session will be held Thursday, May 1, 2008, 6:30 - 8:30 PM, at the Holiday Inn Crabtree Valley, 4100 Glenwood Avenue, in Raleigh, North Carolina. Another will be held Wednesday, May 7, 2008, 6:30 - 8:30 PM, at the Radisson Plaza Hotel Kalamazoo, 100 West Michigan Avenue in Kalamazoo, MI. To register by phone, call 800-336-3747. Online registration forms and information about upcoming sessions can be found at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Outreach_Sessions_SVS_Plants/index.asp.

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ARS Researchers Compare Poultry Chilling Methods

Chilling is an important step in processing poultry carcasses and Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists at the Richard B. Russell Research Center in Athens, GA, recently compared two chilling methods to determine which better suits processors' needs. Food technologist Julie Northcutt, formerly with the ARS Poultry Processing and Swine Physiology Research Unit at Athens, and food technologist Doug Smith, in the ARS Quality and Safety Assessment Research Unit at Athens, evaluated the two primary industry methods in terms of meat quality, food safety and water management. Immersion chilling, in which chicken carcasses are submerged in tanks of cold water or an ice-and-water mix, is the predominant method now used in the United States. Dry-air chilling blasts carcasses with cold air, while evaporative-air chilling combines cold air blasts with water misting. Some poultry processors are beginning to convert to dry-air chilling. Both immersion chilling and air chilling met criteria for limiting bacterial pathogen growth on carcasses. But tender chicken is also very important to consumers. During commercial processing, whole carcasses are aged under refrigerated conditions to allow muscle fibers to relax and become tender. Research showed that air chilling led to better quality of breast fillets and provided higher cooked-meat yields than immersion chilling. In the end, water may be the most important factor in deciding which chilling method may be most feasible in the future. It takes an average of seven gallons of water to process each chicken, and switching to air chilling can save a minimum of one-half gallon per bird. Processors could save about 4.5 billion gallons of water per year if all 9 billion birds processed annually in the United States were air-chilled. To read the complete article, visit the April, 2008 issue of *Agricultural Research* at www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/apr08/chicken0408.htm. (Sharon Durham, ARS, 4/15/08)

Briefly . . .

OK State Offers Advanced HACCP Workshop: The Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, OK will offer an advanced HACCP workshop May 28-29, 2008. The Validation and Verification workshop will include such topics as verification of prerequisite programs and CCP's, verification of HACCP systems, validation and reassessment of HACCP plans, and validation of process equipment. Registration information is available online at www.fapc.biz/haccp.html. For more information, contact Karen Smith by email at karenl.smith@okstate.edu or phone 405-744-6277.

S. Korea Confirms New Bird Flu Outbreak: South Korea's Farm Ministry announced a new outbreak of bird flu at a chicken farm in the southwest on Sunday, taking the total confirmed cases to 16 in poultry just over two weeks. A ministry official said test results were confirmed positive for the H5N1 strain of the virus at a farm in Jeongeup, North Jeolla province, an area which saw an outbreak earlier this month. It was one of three new suspected cases authorities were investigating, as the worst outbreak in four years spreads despite massive culling. *Yonhap News* said South Korea has culled 3.7 million chickens and ducks out of nearly 4.8 million planned, the largest since the country killed 5.3 million between late 2003 and early 2004.

More Companies Cut Back: Tyson Foods, Inc. is consolidating some of its prepared foods business, company officials reported Friday. Production will be discontinued at the Tyson plant in York, Nebraska, and shifted to one of the company's other meat processing operations. The York closing will result in the elimination of 110 jobs. Tyson plans to move some of the equipment from York to the company's recently restructured meat processing operation in Emporia, KS, which employs more than 700 people. Sara Lee Corp. also announced plans to eliminate up to 300 jobs throughout its North American operations this week, including about 100 at its headquarters in Downers Grove, IL. Sara Lee employs about 1,200 in Downers Grove and about 25,000 across North America. A Sara Lee spokesman told the *Chicago Tribune* that the layoffs were focused in management and administrative jobs.

FSIS Notice Clarifies "Exports to Russia" Labeling: Last week, FSIS published Notice 27-08, "Export of Poultry Product Produced for Russia." The Notice explains that additional "Fresh/Frozen Poultry Labeling Requirements," in addition to U.S. Domestic labeling requirements, on cartons of product intended for export to Russia, do not limit the product for shipment ONLY to Russia.. Each carton of poultry product for export to Russia must bear a label in Russian that says: "Product of USA for Export to Russia." The purpose of this language is to make clear that the poultry products within the carton have been processed under conditions that meet Russian import requirements. It does not say, nor is it intended to mean, that the carton of poultry may be exported only to Russia. Consequently, inspection program personnel may issue original or replacement export certification documents for the export of products that bear the Russia statement to countries other than Russia. Refer questions to the Office of International Affairs at 800-233-3935.