

SMA InfoMeat

1957

Representing the Meat Industry for Over 50 Years

2008

February 4, 2008
Volume 33, Issue 6

Email: phyllis@southwestmeat.org
www.southwestmeat.org

Edited by Phyllis Zimmerman

Senate Confirms Schafer as Agriculture Secretary

The Senate confirmed Edward Schafer as agriculture secretary with no objections last Monday, even though Congress and the administration have differing views over a pending five-year farm bill. The former North Dakota governor was confirmed by unanimous consent and attended President Bush's State of the Union address several hours later with other members of the cabinet. Senators voiced no concerns about Schafer's nomination at a congenial confirmation hearing in the Senate Agriculture Committee last week, but several members of the panel encouraged him to work with Congress to smooth stalled talks on the \$286 billion farm bill passed by both the House and Senate last year. In a statement, Bush said Schafer "distinguished himself as an executive with a proven record of results." "He will work with the Congress to pass a responsible farm bill that will provide a safety net for farmers and protect our lands and the environment, while at the same time ensuring federal tax dollars are spent wisely," Bush said. Bush nominated Schafer in October to replace former Nebraska Gov. Mike Johanns, who left the agriculture post to run for the Senate. Schafer was a Republican governor of North Dakota from 1992 to 2000.

USDA Investigates Animal Abuse Allegations

Last week USDA announced that it would investigate the handling of cattle at the federally-inspected Hallmark Meat Packing Plant in California, which was the subject of an animal abuse video released by the Humane Society of the United States. USDA has indefinitely suspended Westland Meat Company as a supplier to Federal food and nutrition programs and the company will not be permitted to produce or deliver any products currently under contract. Hallmark, based in Chino, California, supplies Westland Meat Co., which processes the carcasses. The facility is a major supplier to USDA's National School Lunch Program. Under the suspension, no further contracts will be awarded to Westland Meat Company and the suspension will remain in effect until all investigations are complete and appropriate action is taken by the Department. Additionally, a hold has been placed on all Westland Meat Products that are in, or destined for Federal programs. "I am deeply concerned about the allegations made regarding inhumane handling of non-ambulatory disabled cattle in a federally inspected slaughter establishment," said Ag Secretary Ed Schafer. "We are confident in our inspection system and the food safety regulations that ensure the safety and wholesomeness of the food supply." Schafer called on the Office of the Inspector General to work with FSIS and the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to conduct an investigation into this matter. He assured constituents that any violations of food safety or humane handling laws will be immediately acted upon. He remarked, "It is unfortunate that the Humane Society of the United States did not present this information to us when these alleged violations occurred in the fall of 2007. Had we known at the time the alleged violations occurred, we would have initiated our investigation sooner, and taken appropriate actions at that time." Dr. Kenneth Petersen, Assistant Administrator, Office of Field Operations (OFO) - Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), stated that at this point in the investigation, there is no evidence that "downer" cattle entered the food supply and FSIS inspection has not been suspended. In a statement, Steve Mendell, president of Westland and Hallmark, said the company immediately terminated two employees shown in the video and suspended their supervisor. "We are shocked, saddened and sickened by what we have seen today," Mendell said. "Operations have been immediately suspended until we can meet with all of our employees and be assured these sorts of activities never again happen at our facility."

S O U T H W E S T M E A T A S S O C I A T I O N

4103 SOUTH TEXAS AVENUE, SUITE 101 • BRYAN, TX 77802 • (979) 846-9011 • FAX (979) 846-8198

FSIS Seeks Comments on *Salmonella* Sampling Practices

On January 28, 2008, FSIS announced new policies and practices for the agency's *Salmonella* verification sampling program and related activities in meat and poultry establishments. In February 2006, the agency introduced a comprehensive initiative to reduce the presence of the pathogen in raw meat and poultry products. The initiative includes concentrating resources at establishments with higher levels and changes to the reporting and use of verification test results. FSIS signed a cooperative agreement with the USDA's Agricultural Research Service to ensure that identifying subtype information on *Salmonella* isolates (PFGE patterns) that FSIS collects is compared with information about isolates associated with human illness in PulseNet, a database maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sharing subtype information will enable FSIS and other stakeholders to determine which *Salmonella* serotypes of human health concern are not only appearing in FSIS-regulated products but are more likely to be associated with cases of human illness. On March 28, FSIS will post on its website completed verification sample set results from establishments in Category 2 or Category 3, beginning with results from young chicken slaughter establishments. Currently, the agency schedules approximately 75 new verification sample sets each month for *Salmonella* in raw products. Under the new policies, FSIS is restructuring its sampling and testing initiatives. Comments must be received on or before February 27, through the Federal eRulemaking Portal at www.regulations.gov, by mail to: Docket Clerk, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 2534, South Building, Washington, D.C. 20250, or by e-mail to FSIS.RegulationsComments@usda.gov. All comments must identify FSIS and the docket number FSIS-2006-0034. Comments will be available for review on the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&_Policies/2008_Notices_Index/index.asp.

Appeals Court Overturns Ruling Against Packers

Cattle ranchers who won a \$9.25 million federal jury verdict against four large meat packers failed to show that the companies intentionally manipulated or controlled prices, a federal appeals court ruled last Tuesday. The three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the district court's 2006 ruling in favor of the ranchers, whose lawsuit alleged that large meat packing companies underpaid producers for live cattle. The ranchers had claimed that the packers knew or should have known of a USDA reporting error. The appeals court ruled that the ranchers produced no evidence that the packers intentionally violated the Packers and Stockyards Act by manipulating or controlling, or attempting to manipulate or control, cattle prices. To prove a violation, a plaintiff must show that a packer intentionally committed unlawful conduct, the panel said in its ruling. "Therefore, the district court erred when it instructed the jury that a showing of intent was not required and reversal of the district court is necessary." The class action lawsuit, filed by Herman Schumacher of Herreid, Michael Callicrate of Kansas and Roger Koch of Nebraska, sought almost \$43 million from Tyson Fresh Meats Inc., Cargill Meat Solutions Corp. dba Excel Corp., Swift Beef Co. and National Beef Packing Co. From April 2, 2001, to May 11, 2001, USDA misreported the boxed beef cutout prices for choice and select cuts of meat. The lawsuit alleged the meatpackers knowingly used that information to pay less to cattle producers than they would have if the cutouts were correct. The packers denied knowing about the faulty reports before the USDA acknowledged them. The erroneous reports were the result of a flawed computer program that took into account a lesser quality of beef when calculating cutouts for choice and select cuts. As a result, the choice and select cutouts were too low. Lawyers for the meatpackers said their clients did not know the USDA cutouts were wrong, so they could not have benefited from the information. (AP Newswire, 1/29/08)

Beyond Basics HACCP Workshop Scheduled for March

Once again, SMA, the National Meat Association, and the Department of Animal Science at Texas A&M University have teamed up to sponsor "Beyond Basics: HACCP Plan Improvement Workshop for Raw and Cooked Product Operations." Do you have all the decision-making documentation for your HACCP plan? Can you justify and defend your Critical Control Points and support the frequency of your monitoring and verification activities? Do you have all your scientific supporting documentation on file? Are you ready for an FSIS EIAO review? If you answered no to any of these questions, then you need to attend this valuable workshop. Slated for March 27-28, 2008, participation in the program includes a review and evaluation of your company's HACCP plan, with hands-on help and expert advice to improve it. Workshop topics will include: flow chart review and evaluation, review and scientific support of hazard analysis, defending the selection of CCPs, supporting the selection of monitoring and verification frequencies, HACCP plan validation schemes, composing decision making documentation, and compiling supporting documentation. Registration information is available on the SMA website, or by contacting the SMA office. Don't miss out on this opportunity to fine tune your company's HACCP plan!

Register now for “Developing & Implementing HACCP Plans for the Meat Industry”

to be held at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, **February 13-15, 2008**, hosted by SMA and the Texas A&M Department of Animal Science. The course provides hands-on training in developing a HACCP program for all types of meat slaughtering and processing facilities.

Registration forms are available on our website or by contacting the SMA office.

Sign up today!

POSITION AVAILABLE

A poultry slaughter/processing facility in Gonzales, TX has an immediate opening for a **Plant Manager.**

Poultry experience desired and meat experience a must! Qualified candidates should have good organizational skills, the ability to maintain good customer relations, great personnel skills and be aggressive, forward thinking, and able to deal with USDA. Bilingual a plus!

Interested parties may submit resume along with salary requirements to SMA via fax to: 979-846-8198 or by e-mail to: info@southwestmeat.org.

Briefly . . .

AMS Extends Comment Period on “Naturally Raised” Marketing: USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) issued a Notice in the *Federal Register* reopening and extending the comment period for the proposed voluntary standard for a naturally raised marketing claim. The Notice requesting comments was originally published on November 28, 2007 with the comment period ending on January 28, 2008. The comment period is now reopened and extended until March 3, 2008. The Notice proposes to allow the claim of “naturally raised” to be used if animals have been raised entirely without growth promotants and antibiotics and have never been fed mammalian or avian by-products. The Notice is available at www.ams.usda.gov/news/025-08.htm.

U.S. Achieves Cattle Brucellosis Class Free Status: The USDA announced last Friday that for the first time in the 74-year history of the brucellosis program, all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have simultaneously achieved Class Free status. Texas is the last and final state to be declared brucellosis free. “This tremendous achievement could not have been accomplished without the combined efforts of state and federal agencies and industry,” said Bruce Knight, under secretary for USDA’s marketing and regulatory programs mission area. “But our work is not done. We must now focus our efforts on eradicating brucellosis from the free-ranging elk and bison populations in the Greater Yellowstone Area in order to protect our national cattle herd against future outbreaks of this disease.”

FSIS to Host *E. coli* Workshops: FSIS will hold regulatory education workshops in Alabama and North Carolina on February 27 as part of the agency’s ongoing initiative to enhance assistance to small and very small plants. This specific workshop will cover prerequisite programs and Notices 65-07, 66-07 and 68-07, with special emphasis on *Escherichia coli* O157:H7. The regulatory education session will be held from 6:30 - 8:30 PM at two locations: Hyatt Place Inverness, 4686 Highway 280 East, Birmingham, AL, and Wyndham Raleigh Durham Hotel, 4260 South Miami Blvd., Durham, NC. To register by phone, call 800-336-3747. Online registration forms and information about these sessions can be found at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Outreach_Sessions_SVS_Plants/index.asp.

FSIS Offers Food Defense Guidance for Warehouses, Distribution Centers: In January, FSIS issued the Guide to Developing a Food Defense Plan for Warehouse and Distribution Centers, the latest informational material developed to help industry to protect the food supply through emergency preparedness (www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Guidance_Document_Warehouses.pdf). This guide was designed to help warehouse and distribution center owners develop a food defense plan based on unique operating structure and potential food defense vulnerabilities. FSIS’ Office of Food Defense and Emergency Response (OFDER) also developed a brochure to accompany the guide when it is distributed by front line supervisors conducting routine visits to establishments in their circuit (www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Guidance_Document_Warehouses_Brochure.pdf). Content from food defense workshops are archived on the FSIS website along with other guidance materials at www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Defense_&_Emergency_Response/index.asp.