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FSIS Issues New Instructions for Humane Handling Activities

Last Friday, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) issued FSIS Notice 14-08, "Humane Handling Activities and Documentation in Livestock Slaughter Establishments." This Notice reissues instructions from FSIS Notice 12-05, "Documentation of Humane Handling Activities," provides new instruction for Public Health Veterinarians (PHVs) and other inspection program personnel to conduct humane handling activities, and instructs PHVs to encourage establishments to develop and implement a systematic approach for the humane handling of animals. In 2004, FSIS published an outline for a systematic approach, which is available online at: www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FRPubs/04-013N.htm. PHVs and other inspection program personnel are to vary from day-to-day the time during their tour of duty that they perform their activities to verify that animals are treated humanely. Each slaughter shift they are to make observations under the Humane-handling Activities Tracking System (HATS) under the Electronic Animal Disposition Report System (eADRS) under Category IV, Handling During Ante Mortem Inspection. In addition, they are to verify one or more other HATS categories through each slaughter shift and ensure that all categories are verified routinely. Inspection program personnel are to focus on complete and quality verifications of each category. To prioritize which HATS categories to verify, PHVs or other inspection program personnel are to consider the documentation of the previous activity, historical observations, and direction from the District Veterinary Medical Specialist (DVMS). In addition, inspection program personnel may decide to repeat some activities if a significant amount of time has elapsed from the time of ante mortem inspection and the slaughtering of the animals. Generally, inspection personnel should not pass for slaughter more animals than can be slaughtered in approximately four hours. Inspection program personnel that observe animals being injured or treated inhumanely are instructed to take immediate enforcement action, and if the observed inhumane treatment is of an egregious nature, the regulations at 9 CFR § 500.3(b) apply, which state that "FSIS also may impose a suspension without providing the establishment prior notification because the establishment is handling or slaughtering animals inhumanely. For a detailed summary of the Notice by SMA legal counsel Olsson, Frank and Weeda, P.C., please email phyllis@southwestmeat.org. FSIS Notice 14-08 is available at: www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISNotices/14-08.pdf.

FSIS Issues Backgrounder, New Steps for Humane Handling

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) issued a backgrounder Friday regarding interim and long term steps it is taking following its investigation at the Hallmark/Westland facility. The Agency is implementing several interim actions concerning humane handling activities including: increasing the time allocated per shift by inspectors to verify humane handling activities in ante-mortem areas; conducting surveillance activities to observe animal handling outside approved operating hours from vantage points within and adjacent to the official premises; and issuing a notice to inspectors regarding work methods for conducting humane handling verification activities (see above). The agency plans to prioritize surveillance and inspection activities based on livestock category, humane handling data, facility observations, and an establishment's operating schedule with a focus on establishments where older or potentially distressed animals are slaughtered, such as facilities that handle dairy or veal cattle. The backgrounder is available online at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/NR_022908_01/index.asp.

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FSIS Publishes Q&A on SRM Verification Instructions

FSIS published questions and answers for Directive 6100.4 titled, "Verification Instructions Related to Specified Risk Materials" on February 28. This directive provides instructions to inspection program personnel on how to verify that establishments that slaughter cattle and establishments that process the carcasses or parts of cattle are complying with final regulations that prescribe requirements for the removal, segregation, and disposition of specified risk materials (SRMs). The directive consolidates and updates provisions from FSIS Notices related to SRMs and provides instructions to verify compliance with the parts of the SRM final rule that are associated with non-ambulatory cattle that are in FSIS Directive 6100.1, Ante Mortem Inspection of Livestock. Questions and answers for this directive communicate further clarification to instructions for Agency personnel in carrying out their functions. Visit www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&_Policies/6000_Series-Slaughter_Inspection/index.asp for more information.

Canada Confirms 12th Case of BSE

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has confirmed bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in a six-year-old dairy cow from Alberta. The animal's carcass is under CFIA control, and no part of it entered the human food or animal feed systems. The age and location of the infected animal are consistent with previous cases detected in Canada. This case will not affect Canada's Controlled Risk country status, as recognized by the World Organization for Animal Health. This status clearly acknowledges the effectiveness of Canada's surveillance, risk mitigation and eradication measures. Based on science, it is not expected that this case should impact access to any of Canada's current international markets for cattle and beef. As Canada progresses toward the eradication of BSE, the periodic detection of a small number of cases is fully expected. Canada's BSE surveillance program, which targets the highest risk animals and regions, continues to benefit from very strong producer participation. At the same time, Canada's animal and human health safeguards prevent potentially harmful cattle tissues from entering the human food and animal feed systems. An epidemiological investigation directed by international guidelines is underway to identify the animal's herd mates at the time of birth and potential pathways by which it might have become infected. Once completed, a report on the investigation will be publicly released.

FSIS Offers Web Seminar on Pathogen Control

FSIS will hold a regulatory web seminar on March 12, 2008, which will provide descriptions of new technologies that small and very small plants can use to control pathogens such as *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat meat and poultry products. The focus will be on novel, low-cost, practical, easy-to-implement strategies for controlling pathogens in small and very small plants. The speaker will be Dr. Lynn Knipe, an Associate Professor and Extension Specialist for Processed Meats at Ohio State University. He has developed educational materials for more than 15 training courses given for the meat and poultry industry, as well as published in more than 25 proceedings on short courses to the industry. The seminar will be held from 10 -11 AM EST and from 6 - 7 PM EST. To register by phone, call 800-336-3747 or e-mail questions to netmeetingseminars@fsis.usda.gov.

Does Your HACCP Plan Need An Update? Are You Ready for an FSIS EIAO 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 25-26, 2008** at Texas A&M University.

This workshop will provide a review and evaluation of your company's HACCP plan, with hands-on help 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 and course outline are available on our website.

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Welcome, New Member!

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Briefly . . .

Humane Society Sues USDA: The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) filed suit against the Department of Agriculture last Wednesday over what it claims is a “legal loophole” that allows crippled or injured cattle into the food supply. A USDA rule change made in July allows some downer cows into the food supply, but only if they pass ante-mortem inspection. In 2004, USDA tightened regulations to prohibit the slaughter of all “downer” cows after a case of BSE was discovered in Washington state. The lawsuit alleges that under last year’s change, cows that fell down after an initial veterinarian inspection, but appeared otherwise healthy were allowed to be slaughtered. In the few instances when this occurs, USDA permits veterinarians to determine whether these animals cannot walk due to injury or simple exhaustion or whether there is a more serious cause requiring euthanasia. In filing this lawsuit, HSUS would like to remove the discretionary authority given

to these veterinarians, and convince the public that injured animals are somehow at increased risk of having BSE. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer told a Senate Appropriations subcommittee on Thursday he would not endorse an outright ban on so-called downer cows entering the food supply, stating that current rules are “adequate.”

USDA Suspends Inspectors Following Humane Handling Investigation: The U.S. Department of Agriculture has suspended at least two federal meat inspectors following the humane handling of livestock investigation at the Westland/Hallmark Meat Co., according to a union head last Friday. Stan Painter, chairman of the National Joint Council of Food Inspection Locals, said the USDA confirmed it has placed a veterinarian and a floor inspector assigned to Westland/Hallmark Meat Co. on paid administrative leave. Painter said a local union representative told him that a third inspector was also placed on leave, but he could not confirm it with the agency. USDA has not commented to the press. Two of the plant’s workers face criminal charges and the slaughterhouse has closed.

Researchers Test *E. coli* Vaccine: Dr. Dan Thomson and Dr. T.G. Nagaraja, of Kansas State University, have been working with Dr. Guy Loneragan of West Texas A&M University, to examine the effects of a novel vaccine technology and its ability to decrease *E. coli* shedding in beef cattle. “We had a decrease in cattle shedding *E. coli* by 54% in our first field study,” Thomson said. “However, we increased the amount of SRP exposure in the second field study and decreased the rate of cattle shedding *E. coli* by 85%.” Loneragan said, “This tells us that efficacious interventions that predictably reduce the burden of *E. coli* O157 on cattle entering packing plants are needed. Successful interventions will reduce the burden of *E. coli* O157 to a level that is within the capacity of in-plant interventions to handle. If this can be achieved, then tremendous progress toward preventing *E. coli* O157 from ever getting into ground beef has been made. This vaccine appears to fit this purpose and has great promise.” The team’s findings will be presented at the 2008 Beef Industry Safety Summit in Dallas this week. Thomson and his colleagues studied Siderophore receptor and porin (SRP) technology, which was developed by Epitopix, LLC in Willmar, MN.

FSIS Extends Comment Period for *Salmonella* Verification Sampling: USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service plans to reopen the comment period and extend the implementation date associated with the *Salmonella* Initiative Program portion of the *Salmonella* Verification Sample program, the National Chicken Council announced. The comment period on the *Salmonella* Verification Sample program closed last week. SMA joined NCC, the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association, National Turkey Federation and a variety of other industry groups, in requesting a 60-day extension of the comment period for all provisions of the program and a minimum 180-day extension of all implementation dates. The comment period is closed, however, for provisions in the document related to posting *Salmonella* results and restructuring the *Salmonella* sampling program.