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

Edited by Phyllis Zimmerman

FSIS Issues Notices on Humane Handling

Last week, FSIS published two notices to enhance the Agency's efforts to enforce the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act. The following notices were recently issued:

- Notice 16-08 - "Humane Handling Activities and Documentation in Livestock Slaughter Establishments." This notice provides new instruction for public health veterinarians and other inspection program personnel to conduct humane handling activities randomly throughout their tour of duty. Also, public health veterinarians are to encourage establishments to develop and implement a systematic approach for the humane handling of animals.

- Notice 17-08 - "Increased Verification of Humane Handling Requirements in Livestock Slaughter Establishments." Beginning March 10 through May 6, inspection program personnel assigned to federally inspected livestock slaughter establishments are to increase significantly the time they spend verifying humane handling regulatory requirements and document those verification activities in the Humane Activities Tracking System, as described in FSIS Notice 16-08. Depending upon the type of livestock being slaughtered at the facility, the increase is to be at least 50 percent and up to 100 percent more time conducting HATS activities. The increase in time spent conducting HATS activities will be based on the baseline HATS time for the individual establishments on a weekly basis.

These notices are available on the FSIS web site at www.fsis.usda.gov/regulations_&_policies/FSIS_Notices_Index/index.asp. For a detailed summary of either Notice by SMA legal counsel Olsson, Frank and Weeda, P.C., please email phyllis@southwestmeat.org.

FSIS Announces Inspection Seminars for International Officials

FSIS will hold its 2008 meat and poultry inspection seminars for international officials in Puerto Rico, Texas and Virginia, aimed at familiarizing international government officials with U.S. inspection regulations and procedures used by USDA to assure that the nation's meat, poultry and egg products are safe, wholesome and properly labelled. The seminars will cover issues from farm to table, including the Pathogen Reduction/Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) rule, animal production, import and export procedures and the roles of the Food and Drug Administration, State and local inspection agencies. The seminars will be held at the following locations:

- University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, May 19 - June 6. This session will cover the basic HACCP certification and in-depth review of FSIS verification of HACCP and sanitation requirements, as well as import and export policies and procedures, foreign inspection program equivalence and field trips to import/export locations and processing and slaughter plants.

- West Texas A&M University, Amarillo, TX, August 4-15. This session will be an in-depth seminar for senior international government officials focusing on verification and enforcement of HACCP and pathogen reduction regulations. This is a highly developed seminar intended for officials who have a working knowledge of HACCP principles and their application in a meat or poultry processing plant.

- Ritz Carlton Training Facility in Arlington, VA, from September 8-26. This seminar will provide an overview of FSIS, including an introduction to HACCP, pathogen reduction, import/ export policies and procedures, equivalence, animal production and field visits to import and export locations and processing and slaughter plants.

Visit www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/2008_Meat_&_Poultry_Inspection_Seminars/index.asp.

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2007 Farm Bill Negotiations Drag On

The 2002 farm bill was extended for the third time last week while the House and Senate slowed negotiations amid veto threats over extra spending in the bill. Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) told reporters that he is confident the 2007 farm bill will be passed next month and Iowa Democrat Tom Harkin, chairman of the Senate committee, said a draft could be complete by the end of next week. President Bush said if Congress cannot agree on a farm bill by April 18, it should extend the outmoded 2002 farm law for at least one year. An extension would wipe out plans to spend more on nutrition, stewardship and biofuels, as well as derailing tighter crop subsidy limits. However, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi urged congressional Farm Bill conferees to put aside lingering differences and finish the legislation without delay. The 2002 farm bill was scheduled to expire last September. President Bush has asked Congress to pass the five-year \$280 billion farm policy reauthorization by April 18th. The Bush administration has also reached out to Congress with a proposed budgetary framework for the Farm Bill that would eliminate the threat of a White House veto. To help speed the approval process, the administration announced late last month that it is even willing to consider spending up to \$10 billion above the Congressional Budget Office baseline if the new Farm Bill contains significant commodity program reforms and income payment limitations.

Senators Introduce Bill to Close Plants for Downer Violations

Last Thursday U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) introduced legislation that would shut down slaughter facilities that repeatedly process downed animals and offer stiff fines and temporary one-year shutdowns for first and second time violators. The bill, which is co-sponsored by Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Ted Stevens (R-AK), and Daniel Akaka (D-HI), would give the USDA additional authority to apply a tough penalty system on facilities that violate the law when it comes to handling nonambulatory animals. "Animals that are sick and too weak to stand or walk on their own should not be slaughtered and used for food," Senator Feinstein said. "Companies responsible for this kind of activity shouldn't just receive a slap on the wrist. The safety of our food supply cannot be taken lightly." Senator Boxer said that the abuses and violations that took place at the Hallmark/Westland Meat Company were serious and should serve as a warning sign that USDA needs to tighten its inspection policies. Senator Akaka noted that Feinstein's bill complements the provisions in S. 394, the Downed Animal and Food Safety Protection Act, introduced by Akaka last year, and he hopes that both bills will pass soon. Under this legislation, slaughterhouses would face fines and other penalties if caught trying to slaughter downed livestock. These include:

- A fine for a first violation, based upon a percentage of the facility's gross income, which would be determined by the USDA Secretary;
- USDA inspection services would be suspended for one year following a second violation, effectively shutting down the facility during that time;
- A third violation would require the USDA to withdraw the facility's Grant of Inspection – resulting in the permanent shutdown of the facility.

Additionally, the bill would require the USDA to release the names of establishments that have received recalled products to help distributors, retailers and consumers to better identify and more quickly remove recalled products from their shelves.

Welcome, New Member!

SMA is proud to introduce our newest member:

Gainco, Inc.

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Phone: 770-534-0703 • Fax: 770-534-1865
Email: jpetersen@gainco.com

Don Esch, President • Joe Cowman, VP/General Manager
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Does Your HACCP Plan Need An Update? Are You Ready for an EIAO Review?

There's still time to register 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. Registration brochures are available on our website or call 800-777-5955.

Sign up today!

Briefly . . .

FSIS Posts PowerPoint Presentations Online: The FSIS website has been updated to include a summary page of FSIS PowerPoint presentations. These PowerPoint presentations are prepared for each new FSIS issuance (e.g., notices and directives) to provide a uniform delivery system for supervisors, inspection personnel and industry to minimize the need for clarification after release of new issuances. Each presentation captures the highlights and significant changes in each new issuance. Topics are grouped as follows: Exports, *E. coli* O157:H7, HACCP, Homeland Security, and Imports. The topics may be accessed from the Compliance Assistance page at: www.fsis.usda.gov/regulations_&_policies/Policy_Points/index.asp. These may be helpful to use in training and understanding what FSIS' expectations are on the particular topic addressed as these presentations represent what various FSIS inspection program personnel are also viewing.

FSIS Posts Fourth Quarterly Report on Salmonella Testing: FSIS posted the fourth quarterly progress report on *Salmonella* testing of selected raw meat and poultry products to its website. This report provides preliminary data for the months of October through December 2007. In February 2006, FSIS posted in the *Federal Register* its intention to publish results quarterly and to change how it used the results from its *Salmonella* verification sampling program for meat and poultry establishments as a way to enhance public health protection. The quarterly report is available at www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Quarterly_Salmonella_Results/index.asp.

Firm Recalls Giblets: Cagle's Inc. of Collinsville, AL voluntarily recalled approximately 943,000 pounds of various fresh and frozen poultry giblets and fresh carcasses with giblets inserted that may be adulterated due to improper disposition of the giblets, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service announced last week. Although the carcasses were condemned, FSIS could not verify that the associated viscera, including the giblets, were condemned and diverted for inedible purposes, and they are therefore adulterated. Shipping packages bears the establishment number "P-548" inside the USDA mark of inspection and were distributed to institutions and restaurants nationwide. For a complete list of recalled products, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Recall_010_2008_Release/index.asp.

Comments Open on NACMPI Meeting Topics: The National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection (NACMPI) held a public meeting February 5-6, 2008, to address the planned public health-based slaughter inspection system for young chickens, and how a similar approach could be used for inspection in processing and other slaughter establishments. Transcripts from the meeting are now available for review at www.fsis.usda.gov/About_FSYS/NACMPI_Transcripts/index.asp.

FSIS will continue to accept comments on the topics discussed at the NACMPI public meeting until March 24. Comments may be submitted to PublicHealthBasedInspection@fsis.usda.gov.

FSIS Offers E. coli Workshop: FSIS will hold a regulatory education workshop in California on April 8 to enhance outreach to small and very small plants. The workshop will cover prerequisite programs and notices: 65-07, Notice of Reassessment for *E. coli* O157:H7 Control and Completion of a Checklist for All Beef Operations; 66-07, Multiple Follow-Up Sampling After FSIS Positive *E. 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 *E. coli* O157:H7. The workshop will be held 6:30-8:30 PM at the Radisson Suites Hotel, 1211 East Garvey Street, Covina, CA. To register by phone, call 800-336-3747. Online registration forms are available at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Outreach_Sessions_SVS_Plants/index.asp.

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