

## **FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE**

### **Submitted for the Record**

#### **Statement of Dr. Richard Raymond, Under Secretary for Food Safety Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the status of the Food Safety and Inspection Service's (FSIS) programs and the fiscal year (FY) 2007 budget request for food safety within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). I am Dr. Richard Raymond, Under Secretary for Food Safety. With me today is Dr. Barbara Masters, Administrator of FSIS.

USDA Secretary Mike Johanns and I share a passion for public health. I accepted this position last year because of the Secretary's commitment. I knew he would support and allow us to move forward to further enhance public health protection. The long history this Agency has of protecting public health was another aspect that drew me to this opportunity.

In fact, this year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), which ushered in a new era of food safety on a national level. Even prior to the passage of the FMIA, FSIS' predecessor agency, the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), carried out many important responsibilities to protect public health here and abroad. With an appropriation of \$150,000 in 1884 – the first year of its existence – the BAI focused on preventing diseased animals from being used as food. Then in 1891, the initial Meat Inspection Act of 1890 was amended to cover the inspection and certification of all live cattle and beef for export.

As you see, the USDA has a long and proud history in protecting public health through food safety. To give you an idea of how far we have come in protecting public health, let me share these two facts with you.

One hundred years ago in the United States, the life expectancy was 45 years. Now it is approximately 75 years. And one hundred years ago in the United States, one in five coffins contained a child under five years old. Today that number in the United States is only one in 100 coffins.

These are amazing accomplishments that have had a profound effect on our society and everyone here. Clean water, proper sewage treatment, vaccines and antibiotics have all played an important role, but a safer food supply has also played a vital role in this amazing improvement.

This is truly a good story, but the journey is far from over. There is much more we need to do. Both Secretary Johanns and I want to push the envelope to improve food safety and public health. We all must strive to do better because of constantly evolving threats and challenges to food safety and our public health system. Having been in the medical profession for 27 years as a doctor in both rural and urban parts of Nebraska, and having spent the last six years prior to USDA in public health, I know that the public health environment constantly evolves and it is not always a nine-to-five job. Product recalls during off hours and the Agency's response in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina are just a couple of examples of the many instances when FSIS personnel worked many hours beyond their regular tours of duty.

This is why I am truly proud and impressed by the dedicated professionals at FSIS, who often put in long hours when needed to ensure that our meat, poultry and egg products supply is the safest in the world. Their support and the Agency's successes in protecting the health and well being of millions of consumers worldwide would not have been possible without the resources you have so generously given to us. I will cover FSIS' successes in more detail, our priorities in the coming year, and conclude with a discussion of the FY 2007 budget request.

### **Accomplishments**

We are accountable for protecting the lives and well-being of 295 million people in this country and millions more around the world. There are indications that our risk-based system to protect these consumers is working. We have seen dramatic declines in the prevalence of pathogens in the products we regulate and the numbers of foodborne illnesses stemming from these pathogens due to many actions by the Agency including the use of risk assessments, working with our partners along the farm-to-table continuum, and basing our policies on sound science.

### **Regulatory Sampling**

One such success is apparent in our regulatory sampling for *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Let's take a look at results from our microbiological surveillance testing program for *E. coli* O157:H7. We have gone from 59 positives in 7,010 samples for *E. coli* O157:H7 in CY 2001 to only 14 positives in 8,010 samples in CY 2004. Each year's prevalence rate is listed below.

- In CY 2001, our testing program yielded 59 positive results out of 7,010 samples for a rate of .84 percent;
- In CY 2002, there were 55 positive results from 7,025 samples for a rate of .78 percent;
- In CY 2003, there were 20 positives out of 6,584 samples for a rate of .3 percent; and
- In CY 2004, there were 14 positives out of 8,010 samples for a rate of .17 percent.

Our testing for *Listeria monocytogenes (Lm)* in all ready-to-eat (RTE) products shows similar progress. Compared to a decade ago before HACCP was implemented, we have made substantial progress in *Lm* control, as these statistics from our RTE sampling program indicate:

- In 1995, 3.02 percent tested positive.
- In 1996, 2.91 percent tested positive;
- In 1997, 2.25 percent tested positive;
- In 1998, 2.54 percent tested positive;
- In 1999, 1.91 percent tested positive;
- In 2000, 1.45 percent tested positive;
- In 2001, 1.32 percent tested positive;
- In 2002, 1.03 percent tested positive;
- In 2003, .76 percent tested positive; and
- In 2004, .55 percent tested positive.

### Recalls

Another success has been the break in the annual cycle of multi-million pound recalls and a dramatic decline in the number of recalls each year. The number of recalls had been increasing

since the mid 1990s, with at least one multi-million pound recall being conducted every year until 2002.

For example:

- In 1997, there were 27 recalls for a total of nearly 28 million pounds;
- Followed by 44 recalls of just over 44 million pounds in 1998;
- 58 recalls in 1999 for 40 million pounds of product;
- 76 recalls of almost 23 million pounds in 2000;
- 87 recalls in 2001 for 33 million pounds; and
- Reaching an all-time high of 113 recalls in 2002, totaling nearly 61 million pounds.

After we implemented science-based policies for *E. coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Salmonella*, we saw a dramatic decline in recalls, culminating in a reduction of nearly 18 percent in the number of pathogen-related recalls, from 28 in 2003, to 23 in 2004.

### Foodborne Illnesses

Another significant measure of how our science-based policies are making a major impact on public health is from the annual FoodNet preliminary report published by the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) every spring [the annual report is published later each year]. I will discuss FoodNet later, but according to the CDC, there have been significant declines from 1996 to 2004 in illnesses caused by *E. coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Campylobacter*, and *Yersinia*. Compared to the 1996-98 baseline, illnesses caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 decreased by 42 percent; *Listeria*

*monocytogenes* dropped by 40 percent; *Campylobacter* fell 31 percent; and *Yersinia* decreased by 45 percent.

This is just raw data. To put these figures into real human terms, in 2004, we saved at least an additional 21,815 people from suffering the debilitating effects of a foodborne illness. That is nearly the number of people who work inside the Pentagon on a daily basis.

Stated another way, in 2004, compared to the 1996-98 baseline, an additional 1,939 people did not miss work because of *E. coli* O157:H7. Five hundred thirty-five more people did not suffer from a high fever caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*. Nearly 17,250 consumers did not have severe abdominal cramps caused by *Campylobacter*. And approximately 2,100 people did not have to think, “What did I eat?” thanks to an illness caused by *Yersinia*.

Taken together, these human health results, declines in recalls, and decreasing numbers of pathogens in our sampling program indicate that our risk-based approach is working, and that we are protecting public health through a safer food supply. While this is good news, we still have areas of concern.

### Salmonella

A specific concern is *Salmonella*. When FSIS reported its 2003 data, the Agency acknowledged concern that the percentage of positive *Salmonella* tests had increased slightly in all three poultry categories. While the 2004 data showed more mixed results, there was a continued increase for young chicken (or broiler) carcasses and that number rose again in 2005.

It is clear that the overall incidence of *Salmonella* infections remains far greater than our objective. In 2004 FoodNet data, there were 14.7 cases of culture-proven *Salmonella* infections per 100,000 people. This means 115 people are infected by *Salmonella* every day, or 42,000 every year. In my view, as someone with a medical background, that is way too high.

The CDC's 1999 estimate of *Salmonella* infections is even higher. They estimate about 1.4 million cases of infection each year, with about 16,000 hospitalizations, 580 deaths and \$3.1 billion in health care costs.

The CDC's 2005 FoodNet report (of 2004 data) did not look any better. While it did report that *Salmonella* infections dropped eight percent, only one of the five most common strains, which accounted for 56 percent of the reported *Salmonella* infections in 2004, declined significantly. That strain was *Salmonella* Typhimurium which declined 38 percent.

*Salmonella* Enteritidis and *Salmonella* Heidelberg neither increased nor decreased significantly. However, incidences of *Salmonella* Newport increased by an alarming 41 percent.

It is clear that we must do better if we are going to meet DHHS' Healthy People 2010 objective for *Salmonella*, which is 6.8 infections per 100,000 people. We have already met the DHHS' Healthy People 2010 objective of 1.0 cases of *E. coli* O157:H7 per 100,000 people. In 2004, the CDC reported 0.9 cases of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections per 100,000 people.

However, I do believe there is a way this year to combat *Salmonella* as I will explain later. I believe that we can leverage new technologies and cutting edge research, not only to reach the Healthy People 2010 objective, but to drive the numbers even lower.

#### Cooperation and Collaboration with Other Agencies and Food Safety Partners

Another significant accomplishment from 2005 has been unprecedented cooperation and collaboration with other Federal, State and local agencies and food safety partners.

For starters, Avian Influenza has received a significant amount of press recently. FSIS takes this animal health issue very seriously. We will require a multi-agency effort to address this issue, and we have embarked on such an approach. FSIS has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), in which FSIS agrees to promptly notify APHIS if FSIS inspection program personnel detect signs of foreign animal disease. FSIS is also participating in several interagency groups that include DHHS, as well as State and local government agencies.

In food defense, FSIS has been working very closely with DHHS' Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Department of Homeland Security and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture in developing guidelines and procedures for State and local first responders and Federal food regulatory agencies. This interagency response plan will facilitate cooperation with State and local emergency efforts when responding to incidents involving the food supply. We have already started testing these guidelines. We conducted an exercise through our district office in California with the California Department of Agriculture,



the California Department of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, FDA, Federal Bureau of Investigation, CDC, and local and county health officials. We intend to hold more of these exercises with each FSIS district office and our partners so that we can make continuous improvements to the guidelines.

We also have been working closely with industry to help them develop voluntary comprehensive food defense activities for every establishment. We feel it is essential that all slaughter, processing, import and export establishments take steps to ensure the security of their operations. Earlier in 2005, we made available on FSIS' Web site an "Industry Self-Assessment Checklist for Food Defense" and model food defense activities that they can use to guide their actions to defend the safety of their product. In addition, we have our inspectors ready and trained to assist industry as they enhance the protections they already have in place. As of this date, FSIS inspection program personnel have conducted over 1.3 million evaluations of establishment food defense activities and have found less than 1,500 areas that needed to be addressed.

The model food defense activities were developed as a result of the vulnerability assessments that FSIS conducted for selected domestic and imported food products. These assessments allowed us to rank food products and potential contaminating agents in order of highest concern. Using this risk-based ranking, during periods of heightened awareness, FSIS' laboratories examine samples for threat agents posing the greatest risk as identified in FSIS' vulnerability assessments.

Although the findings from these vulnerability assessments are classified, FSIS has been training industry representatives in how to conduct the assessments. As a result, many companies are

now conducting their own assessments and taking appropriate measures to defend their processing lines and distribution chains from intentional contamination.

Another example of collaboration is the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). This joint FSIS-FDA effort of national, State, and local laboratories provides ongoing surveillance and monitoring of food and will promptly respond to an intentional contamination that targets the Nation's food supply. I will discuss FERN in more detail later when I go over our priorities for FY 2007.

We are also working closely with the CDC and FDA to improve our ability to link foodborne illness estimates with different food vehicles. Data on foodborne illnesses due to specific pathogens also needs to be connected with data on the prevalence of different pathogens in specific foods.

The Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, or FoodNet which I mentioned before, is part of CDC's Emerging Infections Program, and it allows FSIS and our Federal, State, and local food safety partners to integrate foodborne illness data to determine the burden of foodborne disease, monitor foodborne disease trends, and determine the extent of foodborne diseases attributable to specific foods. Since 1995, FSIS has worked closely with the CDC, FDA, and State and local epidemiologists and public health laboratories in making FoodNet an essential public health tool.

FoodNet includes active surveillance of foodborne diseases, case-control studies to identify risk factors for acquiring foodborne illness, and surveys to assess medical and laboratory practices related to foodborne illness diagnosis. It provides estimates of foodborne illness and sources of

specific diseases that are usually found in the United States and interprets these trends over time. Data are used to help analyze the effectiveness of our HACCP rule and other risk-based regulatory actions, as well as to develop public education initiatives.

### Consumer Safety Education

Speaking of education, last year FSIS reached nearly 120 million citizens by developing and distributing brochures, technical papers, and booklets through the media, educators, the Agency's Web site, the Meat and Poultry Hotline, FSIS' virtual representative "Ask Karen," and the USDA Food Safety Mobile. As a medical doctor, I truly value the importance of effective and continuous food safety outreach to consumers. It is the key to any multi-pronged strategy to prevent people from getting sick and possibly dying.

In FY 2005, our Meat and Poultry Hotline handled nearly 88,000 consumer calls on the safe storage, preparation, and handling of meat, poultry and egg products and over 130 media and information multiplier calls that included requests from newspapers, magazines and book authors along with live interviews with radio and television stations. From a public health standpoint, we still want to serve consumers even if an unexpected event affects the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. No one should have to suffer through a foodborne illness after they have tried to contact our Hotline and have found it is down due to some unforeseen incident in the capital area. That is why in FY 2006, we are expanding and upgrading the Hotline communication equipment to ensure uninterrupted service to the public in the case of an unexpected event.

Research has shown FSIS that the at-risk, under-served, and Spanish-speaking populations require education and messages geared to their needs. In FY 2005, FSIS continued to develop education programs for elderly, immune-compromised, and other at-risk individuals, and assisted with revisions to the American Medical Association/CDC/FDA/FSIS *Diagnosis and Management of Foodborne Illness: A Primer for Physicians*. We also developed a brochure titled, *What Transplant Recipients Should Know About Food Safety*. This is just one in a series of publications that will be developed targeting other at-risk audiences.

In an unprecedented effort to reach those underserved, yet at-risk for foodborne illness, FSIS is cosponsoring a food safety conference entitled, “Reaching At-Risk Audiences and Today's Other Food Safety Challenges,” with the FDA, CDC, and private sector organizations. The goals of this conference include sharing current surveillance and epidemiological data on foodborne illness; presenting strategies leading to enhanced food safety knowledge, skills, and abilities in the general population and among at-risk populations; and to communicate the latest science-based safe food handling principles and practices.

Also, FSIS produced a public service announcement (PSA) “Fight BAC!®” in Spanish and distributed more than 50,000 copies to a national network of physicians’ offices. In addition to being able to view the PSA, patients had access to flyers describing listeriosis, a foodborne illness more common in the Hispanic population.

The USDA Food Safety Mobile that I mentioned earlier tours nationwide to support food safety education efforts and reach consumers where they live. In FY 2005, the Mobile appeared at

State and county fairs, food events, media events, schools, libraries, grocery stores, community events, parades, festivals, health and safety expos, trade shows, conventions, FSIS District Offices, and at FSIS events in conjunction with visits and presentations by USDA officials. Hundreds of thousands of educational items have been distributed and millions of consumers have been reached through media coverage of the Mobile. Since its launch in March 2003, the Food Safety Mobile has traveled more than 66,000 miles, appearing in 247 events in approximately 185 cities, in 48 States and the District of Columbia.

### Hurricane Katrina Response

The Mobile was a vital component of our Hurricane Katrina response strategy. We deployed it in September 2005 to areas affected by Hurricane Katrina to provide firsthand food safety education and assistance to prevent any outbreaks of foodborne illness. I realized that food safety would not be one of the top priorities with many of the affected populace, given that they were displaced, grieving the loss of loved ones, or looking for missing family and friends. However, we were gravely concerned about the public health consequences of the hurricane's aftermath. With power outages and flooding of contaminated water, the potential for people consuming contaminated food was alarmingly high, which was why I ordered the Mobile to immediately abandon its previously scheduled course in the Northeast and head down to the Gulf Coast. I also directed FSIS to lease a second Food Safety Mobile to go to the affected areas.

During its two-and-one-half month tour of the Gulf States, the Food Safety Mobile reached nearly 41,000 total consumers and distributed food safety brochures, bleach, hand wipes and

thermal bags. The second Mobile appeared at 18 events, reaching an additional 15,000 consumers.

In addition to our swift and aggressive consumer outreach, FSIS worked as rapidly as possible with industry to resume operations at meat, poultry and egg product establishments in the affected areas of the Gulf States. By September 5, 2005, FSIS had deployed approximately 30 additional inspection program personnel and compliance staff personnel to this area so these plants could quickly resume operations. These personnel also oversaw the appropriate disposal and decontamination procedures at the plants.

On September 20, 2005, FSIS began increased *Salmonella* testing of raw meat and poultry products in the affected areas of the Gulf Coast to provide microbial data to compare with nationwide data. FSIS also trained additional non-field staff to assist in conducting intensified verification tests in ready-to-eat establishments for *Listeria monocytogenes*, including collecting food-contact surface and environmental samples, to supplement product sampling and food safety assessments. These provided an additional layer of microbial testing and verification to ensure the safety of the ready-to-eat meat products.

### **Building the Foundation of a More Robust Risk-Based Inspection System**

The successes from 2005 are varied and significant, ranging from reductions in pathogen prevalence to a quick and concerted response in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The examples I just covered indicate that our food safety system works and is strong. However, I do not want to serve as just a caretaker of a good system.

Even though FSIS has accomplished a lot, people still get sick and die each year from consuming contaminated food. As a medical doctor, that simply does not set well with me. I did not accept this job last year to recall hamburger, ham, sausage or any other product on a routine basis. I want to focus our time and valuable resources on prevention, rather than on response. It is a common sense, cost-effective public health strategy that best serves the American consumer.

However, in order to move forward with this approach, we are going to need the help of everyone along the farm-to-fork continuum and Congress. I know with your support, we can further improve upon the food safety successes that we have already seen.

The cornerstone of our strategy is to move forward on implementing a more robust risk-based inspection system. Our current system, while strong, is not suited to the future realities of food safety and public health, and we will need the new capabilities offered by an enhanced risk-based system.

Our 100-year old inspection system was based on visual examination for visible signs of disease. The future demands that we be able to focus more on things that the human eye cannot see, things the nose cannot smell, and things the fingers cannot feel.

We will also need the ability to anticipate and quickly respond to food safety challenges before they negatively affect public health. This is vital, as is a system that will allow us to use our finite resources more effectively and efficiently to further improve food safety. As a public

health agency, we must have the capability and capacity to be smarter and act more efficiently, quickly and flexibly.

This means a move away from a regulatory agency that protects public health by recalling dangerous product or withdrawing marks of inspection toward one that is focused on actively preventing foodborne illnesses from ever occurring. However, it is important to note that FSIS already uses a risk-based approach to food safety. Our goal is to further enhance and strengthen that system so that we are prepared for the food safety challenges in the next century. This is why we are requesting in the FY 2007 budget an increase of \$2.6 million to help us move toward our goal of a more robust risk-based inspection system.

To continue our progress toward a more robust risk-based inspection system, we need to be sure that we communicate openly and often with all of our food safety stakeholders. We will use a transparent and inclusive process to seek input on a wide range of issues related to creating a more robust risk-based inspection system.

We will proceed through a public process, gaining input from all of our stakeholders. At the last meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection (NACMPI) in November, the Committee recommended a third-party approach to assist us in reaching out to, and gaining input from, our stakeholders. For this purpose, we are now in the process of selecting a third party. We have already established a NACMPI subcommittee to provide regular, ongoing guidance. It is important that we ensure everyone participates in this process.



In FY 2007, we plan to advance risk-based inspection in processing establishments through team inspection. This approach will utilize Agency-developed measures, which gauge an establishment's inherent hazard; monitor how well establishments are controlling hazards and complying with regulatory requirements; and provide for risk-based verification testing for *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat products and the environment, and for *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157:H7 in raw products.

Effective implementation of team inspection in processing and risk-based verification testing will require not only workforce training for risk-based inspection, but also implementation support activities to ensure consistency of application after training.

As part of a comprehensive risk-based inspection system, we will develop risk-based verification strategies for meat and poultry in commerce that can be used by FSIS personnel. Such activities would complement inspection activities performed in-plant. This initiative in FY 2007 covers the cost of testing the policies, methods, and information technology (IT) applications to determine which mix provides the best consumer protections within FSIS' regulatory authority.

Data obtained through surveys enable the Agency to base policies and regulations for inspection on a comprehensive understanding of the measures taken by establishments to reduce foodborne risks and the efficacy of such measures as processing technologies and pathogen reduction interventions. These surveys will be used to measure the potential impact of proposed regulatory changes, identify which segments of the industry may be achieving a regulatory standard, and identify improvements other establishments will need to make to achieve the standard.

### Risk-Based *Salmonella* Control

Part of the \$2.6 million request for risk-based inspection is for risk-based *Salmonella* control, which amounts to \$602 thousand. Given the challenge we face with *Salmonella* that I mentioned earlier and the fact that there has been an increasing concern about outbreaks attributed to emerging and multi-drug resistant strains of *Salmonella*, it is imperative that we take a risk-based approach to investigating and controlling the incidence of *Salmonella* in meat, poultry and egg products.

Since the prevalence rate in broiler chickens seems to be a trouble spot, we are looking into revising the performance measure for *Salmonella* on this particular product. Since 1998, FSIS has used the prevalence of *Salmonella* on broiler chickens, which is a regulatory performance standard for the production of raw poultry carcasses (broilers), to measure the Agency's performance in achieving its goal of reducing foodborne illness.

However, FSIS has identified three weaknesses with the current measure. The first one is that the measure is scientifically unsound. The FSIS regulatory testing program that is the source of the data used in the current performance measure does not provide a true measure of prevalence of the pathogen.

The second weakness is that the current measure overlooks an important public health issue. The current measure is for generic *Salmonella*, including those that are not attributed to foodborne illness. Not all serotypes of *Salmonella* are equally dangerous for humans. There are many

known serotypes of *Salmonella* found in broilers, some of which cause human illness with varying severity. In fact, the most common serotype is not a significant factor in human foodborne illness.

The third weakness is that the current testing program is not consistent with FSIS' goal of transitioning to a more risk-based inspection system. Plant process controls for *Salmonella* vary widely. Since 2003, aggregate percent positives in sample sets have increased each year from 11.5 percent in 2002, to 16.3 percent in 2005 while still remaining within regulatory performance standards. In order to improve program performance, FSIS is working to strengthen its verification testing program by making it more risk-based.

Recognizing these weaknesses, FSIS will develop a new performance measure that more accurately measures:

- 1) Agency performance in achieving its goal of reducing foodborne illness; and
- 2) Plant performance, including identification of those plants that are most likely to have *Salmonella* serotypes that cause human illness.

FSIS has analyzed data from approximately seven years of regulatory testing for *Salmonella* in broilers. The Agency found strong evidence that plants that have consistently achieved a percent positive rate in sample sets at or below half the current regulatory performance standard are less likely to produce raw product that have the serotypes of *Salmonella* that are causes of human illness. Since these plants have been successful in controlling overall *Salmonella* to low levels, they would also have low levels of serotypes that are causes of human illness.

As a result, achievement of performance goals established under the new measure would provide a better indication of process control and relate more directly to the improved safety of broilers. Consequently, we are developing a new measure to replace the existing *Salmonella* performance measure that would demonstrate the potential for reduction in exposure of humans to the serotypes of *Salmonella* most commonly associated with human illness.

As we move forward on *Salmonella*, much can be learned from the success from our risk-based model dealing with *E. coli* O157:H7. In 2002, FSIS issued a *Federal Register* notice to manufacturers of raw ground beef to conduct reassessments of their HACCP plans. Our scientifically trained personnel conducted food safety assessments through the first-ever, comprehensive reviews of all-beef products. The reassessments and enhanced process control by plants, with assessments by FSIS and testing, led to reductions in *E. coli* O157:H7 percent positives in FSIS' verification testing program.

Using this model, we are planning to re-evaluate the broiler industry's process controls for serotypes of *Salmonella* that cause human illness. We will use food safety assessments as tools to reassess higher risk plants, which have the greatest potential to operate above the existing *Salmonella* performance standard. A food safety assessment is a systematic evaluation of a plant's scientific basis, design, validation and execution of its HACCP plan. In an example of how effective food safety assessments are, one broiler plant had a 30 percent positive *Salmonella* rate. After our enforcement, investigation, and analysis officers conducted the assessment, the

plant has a two percent positive *Salmonella* rate and is holding steady. This is the kind of result we anticipate for *Salmonella*.

#### Outreach to Small and Very Small Plants

In order to move forward with a more robust risk-based inspection system, we need to have the support of industry. All plants need to fully embrace HACCP, and a critical sector of the industry we regulate are small and very small plants, which comprise the majority of the plants we oversee each day.

We realize that small and very small plants have unique needs when it comes to full-scale HACCP implementation and that they might not have as many resources as large plants do. Therefore, I made an absolute priority of increasing the communication between FSIS and the small and very small plants so that we can identify and respond to their needs faster and more efficiently with regard to full-scale implementation of their HACCP plans.

Since September 2005, we have held listening sessions for small and very small plant owners and operators in Montana, California and Pennsylvania. These sessions gave us a better understanding of what was causing gaps between a plant's performance and our expectations for them to operate under HACCP. As a result, we have taken several actions to remedy any misunderstanding and deliver what small and very small plants need to embrace HACCP effectively.

I do believe that education facilitates a greater understanding and helps close any performance gaps in implementation of HACCP plans. It also keeps FSIS from having to take enforcement action on establishments. I would be much happier with a solution that calls for increased education rather than for increased regulation; however, I have made the point to industry that we will do whatever it takes to ensure that a robust HACCP system is implemented and maintained in each and every plant, large or small. Public health is our responsibility and we will take regulatory action as necessary.

This is absolutely necessary to move forward because when a child eats a hamburger, that burger should be as safe as it possibly can be, regardless of the size of plant it comes from. If that child gets *E. coli* O157:H7 or *Salmonella*, then that child, the child's parents and the child's doctor do not care what size that plant was, or how much ground beef it produced.

### Workforce Training

In addition to industry's complete embracing of HACCP, training FSIS' workforce is a key component to ensure a robust risk-based inspection system. I understand that it requires a large investment in FSIS employees to ensure they have the training and skills they need to be successful in a risk-based environment. However, it is an investment that I know will continue to provide food safety dividends well into the future. If they succeed, then the American consumer is better off as well.

Training enables inspection program personnel a wider range of opportunities to make a real difference in public health, and it also opens new avenues of career advancement to our

employees. I also believe training improves job satisfaction, which leads to increased employee retention and recruitment.

One of the Agency's top priorities in recent years has been to aggressively address the training and education of its workforce. We truly appreciate the support you have provided for us to pursue this goal. The increased workforce capabilities made possible by the changes and improvements in FSIS training have led to measurable improvements in public health, as I mentioned before using the data from the CDC. The declines in pathogen contamination further demonstrate that your support for our investment in training is a critical component of our public health infrastructure.

#### Public Health Communications Infrastructure

Another critical building block for the foundation of a robust risk-based inspection system is to have a public health communications infrastructure that has the ability to collect, assess and respond to data in real-time. This is why we are requesting \$1.9 million in FY 2007 to enhance our communications infrastructure.

It is vital for our in-plant personnel to have this data in real-time in order to do their jobs properly and effectively. If they can do their jobs effectively, then FSIS will be able to react more rapidly in a crisis to better protect public health and ultimately save lives.

Enhancing effective field communication capabilities has been a major goal of FSIS. Yet, while these efforts are continuing, approximately 40 percent of FSIS' field inspection workforce

remains without timely communication capabilities. Part of the \$1.9 million request for the communications infrastructure would be \$615 thousand dedicated specifically toward inspector communication enhancement. With a need for increases in food safety assessments, enforcement actions and increased readiness, timely communication is vital to more effectively protect consumers.

We need to continue the progress we have been making in replacing dial-up connections with high speed telecommunication lines for our field force. High-speed access enables us to receive real-time data and thus react more quickly to protect the public health. It is also an essential time-saving and cost-saving mechanism that makes management of the Agency's operations more efficient in the long run. We provided high speed telecommunication lines first to slaughter establishments with inspection personnel having bovine spongiform encephalopathy regulatory enforcement responsibilities. In FY 2006, we are continuing this strategy of bringing broadband service to over 2,300 base plant locations.

In addition, the rapid pace of technological change in operating systems, application software and hardware, as well as the failure/repair rates for equipment, necessitates the replacement of computers every three years. The \$1.3 million requested for computer replacements will enable FSIS to meet the demands of major operating system changes and eliminate the need for warranties extended beyond three years and expenditures not covered by the warranties. We need to ensure our compliance officers, supervisory and inspection program personnel, as well as State inspection personnel receive replacement computers. At present, this accounts for about 4,000 microcomputers in the field, and our goal is to replace 1,300 to 1,400 computers annually.



## Food Emergency Response Network

To continue the advancements in food defense that I mentioned earlier, we are asking for an increase of \$15.8 million for food and agriculture defense. A major component of this request would be allocated for the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN), which I also mentioned earlier.

Consumer safety and public health protection will be enhanced through FERN. This will be possible through achieving FERN's four primary objectives. The first objective is to help us and partnering agencies prevent, or at least mitigate the brunt of, any attacks on the food supply through surveillance testing. The second objective is to prepare for emergencies by strengthening laboratory capabilities through the development and validation of analytical methods, analyst training and proficiency testing. The third objective is to respond to threats, attacks and emergencies in the food supply by providing a communications network and the necessary laboratory surge capacity. And the final objective is to provide laboratory support for investigations of, and recovery from, terrorism-related events.

Being able to respond rapidly to a sudden surge in demand for testing is imperative, if we are going to restore consumer confidence in the safety of the Nation's food supply and to maintain U.S. economic stability in spite of the event. We only need to look back at the anthrax attacks in the autumn of 2001 to learn a valuable lesson. Only a few envelopes containing traces of anthrax were opened and only a few people died.

But what happened in this bioterrorism event was that all Americans became fearful of exposure to anthrax when they came in contact with any white, powdery substance. Demand for laboratory testing of these substances was nationwide, and most laboratories did not have the necessary resources to handle this surge, causing prolonged delay before people knew if they had been exposed or not, putting a great burden on the Nation's psyche.

When I worked in Nebraska's Department of Public Health, we had set up and maintained an effective laboratory testing system that could handle surge capacity within that State, whether it was for events stemming from intentional acts or Mother Nature. If we had not built such capacity, then only a few State laboratory technicians would have been inundated with West Nile virus testing when the virus hit Nebraska. We had an integrated system, so that when West Nile did become a public concern, we were able to call upon laboratory technicians from hospitals and universities to start testing for the virus. Having several hundred laboratory technicians test for West Nile as opposed to having only several do the job was certainly a much more sensible and effective public health strategy.

If something were to happen in the food and agriculture sector that would cause public alarm, then our current system simply would be inundated. FSIS has three regulatory sampling laboratories and they work great under normal conditions. However, we need the surge capacity to help us handle at least three potential likely scenarios. The first one would be a hoax – let's say someone or some organization claims they have contaminated the food supply, but have not. The second would be an actual attack on the food supply by an individual or group. The third would be an outbreak stemming from an act of Mother Nature. In all three cases, there would be

mass public concern and significant economic consequences. In the last two cases, there could potentially be hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people getting sick and dying. The sad reality is that we do not at this time have a laboratory system effective enough to handle the surge capacity if one of these three scenarios were to happen today or tomorrow.

This is why FSIS' \$13 million request for FERN will help provide participating laboratories with the necessary training, laboratory equipment and supplies so that we can handle surge capacity and achieve the other three objectives I mentioned earlier. From a public health standpoint, an investment in FERN is an absolute essential priority if we want to prevent, or mitigate, the loss of life and economic hardship if an intentional or unintentional incident affecting the food supply were to happen.

### **FY 2007 Budget Request**

I appreciate having the opportunity to discuss a number of FSIS' accomplishments and priorities with you. Now, I would like to present an overview of the FY 2007 budget request for FSIS.

Implementation of these budget initiatives is imperative to helping us attain FSIS' public health mission. In FY 2007, FSIS is requesting an appropriation under current law of \$862.9 million.

### **Supporting FSIS' Basic Mission**

The FSIS budget request for FY 2007 supports the Agency's basic mission of providing continuous food safety and inspection in each meat, poultry, and egg products establishment in the United States.

The Agency's permanent statutory obligation is to provide continuous inspection of meat, poultry, and egg products is a labor intensive mandate, thereby making its salary cost relatively inflexible. An increase of \$16 million for the FSIS inspection program is requested to provide for the 2.2 percent pay raise for FSIS employees in FY 2007 to assure that the Agency is provided sufficient funds to maintain programs. Failure to provide the full amount for pay and benefit costs jeopardizes the effectiveness of FSIS programs and weakens food safety.

We also seek an increase of \$1.9 million for Agency efforts to support the President's Management Agenda in the area of IT. As I pointed out earlier, the Agency is seeking ways to have electronically stored information from all FSIS personnel integrated and available in real-time. This would allow inspectors ready access to information necessary to protect the public health.

As I mentioned several times, as someone with a medical background, I view the bottom line of preventing foodborne illness and saving lives very stringently. My focus is on prevention, and I believe the request for increases of \$2.6 million for risk-based inspection and \$15.8 million for food and agriculture defense will move us where we need to be to further enhance public health protection.

In order to facilitate cross-agency coordination of information, FSIS seeks an increase of \$600,000 for International Food Safety in order to link to the International Trade Data System managed by the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection.

## User Fees

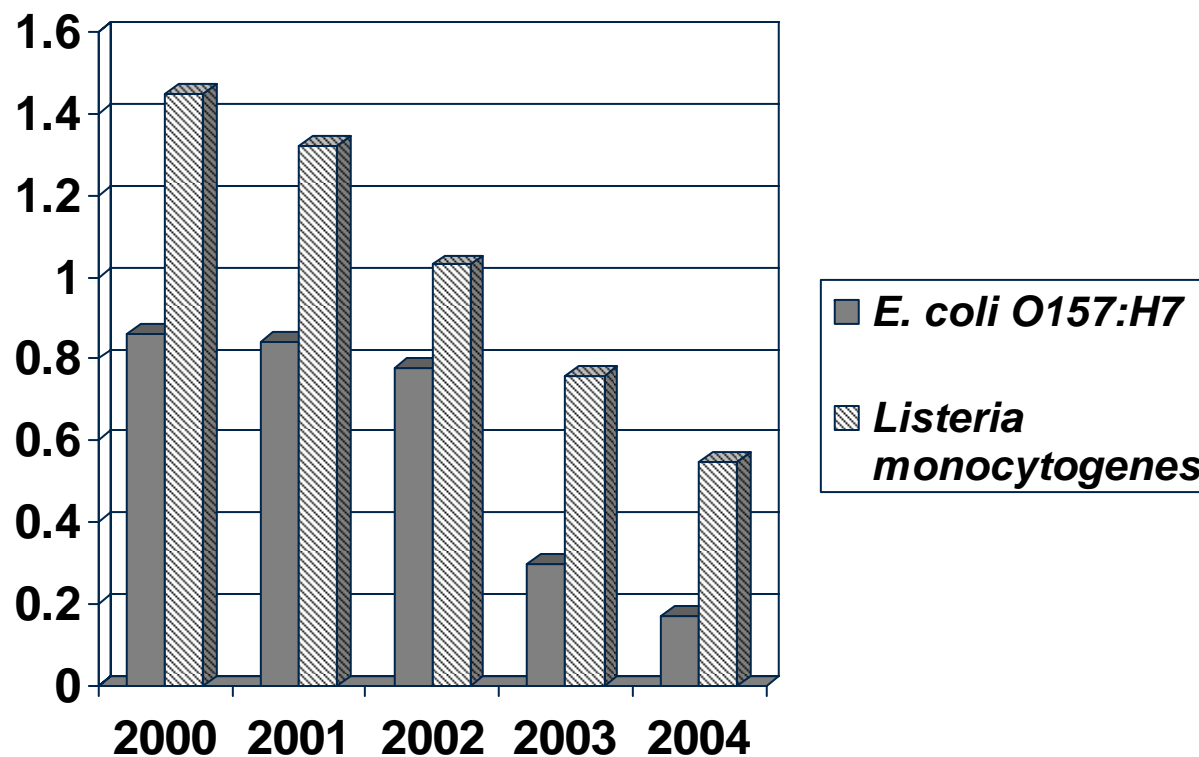
Inspection services for the cost of Federal meat, poultry and egg products during all approved shifts are now paid with Federal funds. Legislation will be re-submitted to Congress, which would provide USDA with the authority to collect fees for inspection services beyond one eight-hour shift per day, saving significant Federal costs by transferring these costs to the industries that directly benefit from services performed. New industry costs would be a small fraction of one cent per pound of production, but would allow FSIS to ensure a safe food supply. Of the \$862.9 million requested in the FY 2007 budget, \$105 million is proposed to be derived from these user fees.

## **Closing**

We will continue to engage the scientific community, public health experts, and all interested parties in an effort to identify science-based solutions to public health issues to ensure positive public health outcomes. It is our intention to pursue such a course of action this year in as transparent and inclusive a manner as is possible. The strategies I discussed today will help FSIS continue to pursue its goals and achieve its mission of reducing foodborne illness by protecting public health through food safety and security.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to address with the Subcommittee and submit testimony regarding the steps that FSIS is taking to remain a world leader in public health. I look forward to working with you to improve our food safety system, ensuring that we continue to have the safest food supply in the world.

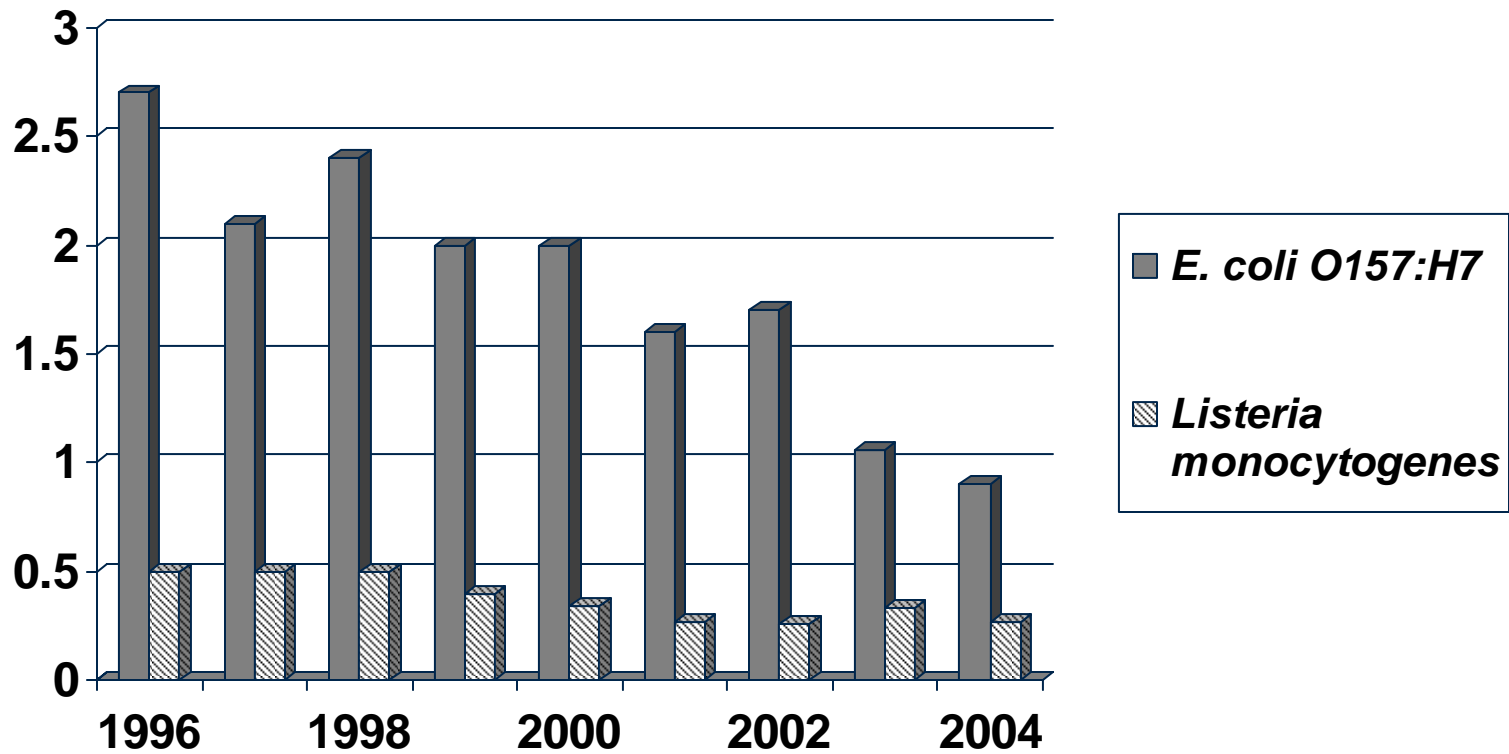
## Declines in Positive Regulatory Samples for *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Listeria Monocytogenes*



Percentage of Positive Regulatory Samples



## Decreases in Foodborne Illnesses Since 1996-98 Baseline



1996-2004 FoodNet Foodborne Illness Incidence Data  
(Cases per 100,000 persons)