

**FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE**

**Submitted for the Record**

**Statement of Dr. Barbara J. Masters, Administrator,  
Food Safety and Inspection Service  
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 be here today as we discuss public health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) fiscal year (FY) 2007 budget request for the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

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 the national level. Although FSIS was established under its current name by the Secretary of Agriculture on June 17, 1981, our history dates back prior to 1906. Our mission is to ensure that meat, poultry, and egg products distributed in commerce for use as human food are safe, secure, wholesome, and accurately labeled. FSIS is charged not only with administering and enforcing the FMIA, but also the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA), the Egg Products Inspection Act (EPIA), portions of the Agricultural Marketing Act, and the regulations that implement these laws.

At FSIS, we are committed to the idea that an effective food safety and food defense system must be rooted in science. To meet its goal of protecting public health, FSIS will continue to review policies and regulations in light of what the science demands. We will also work with interested parties to modernize and enhance our inspection and food safety and defense

verification efforts. All of this is necessary if we are to fulfill our public health mandate and stay ahead of the evolving threats to America's food safety.

I am pleased to report that progress is being made in measurable and significant ways. An effective gauge of how our scientific policies are working is looking at how public health is positively impacted. Our efforts are clearly on the right track, as evidenced by the decline in foodborne illness over a recent six-year span. For instance, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last spring reported continued reductions in foodborne illnesses from 1996-1998 through 2004 stemming from *E. coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Campylobacter*, and *Yersinia*. The report indicates that reductions in foodborne illness reported in 2003 were not an isolated event and that sustained progress is being made toward reducing illness from very dangerous foodborne pathogens.

While these reported declines in foodborne illness are dramatic, we believe more can – and will – be done. We will realize further progress in the food safety dynamic by implementing a more robust, risk-based inspection system.

The foundation of this system will be the ability to anticipate and quickly respond to food safety challenges before they have a negative impact on public health. While FSIS incorporates risk assessments in our approach to food safety, our goal is to further strengthen the system so that inspection program personnel may more effectively anticipate problems before they happen. A more robust, risk-based inspection system will ensure that our Agency's resources are used in the most effective and efficient way possible. We need a more robust system to help us meet future

food safety challenges, some of which are either evolving or unknown today. An optimal risk-based inspection system is what FSIS is striving to achieve, and it will continue to guide our activities in FY 2007.

Ensuring the safety of America's meat, poultry, and egg products requires a strong infrastructure. To accomplish this task, FSIS has dedicated public health servants stationed throughout the country and in laboratories, plants, and import houses everyday. In FY 2005, the Agency had approximately 7,600 full-time personnel protecting the public health in 5,870 Federally-inspected establishments nationwide. FSIS inspection program personnel performed ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection procedures at 1,700 slaughter establishments to ensure public health requirements were met in the processing of 140 million head of livestock, 9.4 billion poultry carcasses, and about 4.3 billion pounds of liquid egg products. In FY 2005, FSIS inspection program personnel also conducted over eight million procedures to verify that establishments met food safety and wholesomeness requirements. In addition, during FY 2005, approximately 4.3 billion pounds of meat and poultry and about 8.4 million pounds of egg products were presented for import inspection at U.S. ports and borders.

In an Agency the size of FSIS, with employees stationed all around the country, it quickly became apparent to me that effective communication was central to our mission. I have made improved communication a major priority, and we have greatly enhanced our communications tools including a redesigned, consumer-friendly Website; the debut of an Intranet for employees where they can access important and vital information; the launch of "all-employee" meetings via Web-cast; and more regular communications from the Administrator's office to the field.

We continue to work on communications enhancements in order to ensure our entire workforce remains fully knowledgeable about the Agency's mission and goals.

Fulfilling our public health mandate to ensure a safe and wholesome food supply is a demanding responsibility and an exciting challenge. I would like to thank you for providing FSIS with the resources to protect meat, poultry, and egg products. For FY 2006, FSIS received \$837.7 million (\$829.4 million after rescission), and these funds are helping to move the public health agenda forward. For instance, for FY 2006, Congress approved \$2.2 million in additional funds for frontline inspection. This funding is enabling us to hire additional supervisory consumer safety inspection personnel, thus freeing up time for Public Health Veterinarians to focus on more complex and demanding food safety projects such as conducting food safety assessments and focusing on the design of food safety systems. Further, the additional funding you have provided us in the area of food defense has helped the Agency in further developing our response to contamination of the food supply, whether intentional or accidental. I will provide additional information on both these subjects later in this document.

Today, I would like to share with you how we will further implement a more robust, risk-based inspection system, as well as some of our leading pathogen control efforts; our enhanced outreach to small and very small plants; our workforce training initiatives; our food defense activities; and our public health communications programs.

### **FSIS' Six Priorities**

First, I want to reiterate that the Agency operates under six operational priorities, which I first shared with you two years ago. FSIS continues to hold itself accountable for improving public health. When we established these priorities, we outlined a series of actions to enable us to better understand, predict, and prevent contamination of meat and poultry products to improve health outcomes for American families. Since then, we have been building upon these priorities, all equally important, and continue to improve the Agency's infrastructure with a greater attention to risk so that we can continue improving our performance under the public health model. I should note that even though our priorities remain the same, we are constantly raising the bar so we can move forward to enhance public health protection. These priorities are building the infrastructure for further implementation of a more robust, risk-based inspection system.

### **Continuing Evolution of Inspection and Enforcement: The Three Pillars**

The first major initiative I want to discuss today is the continuing evolution of inspection and enforcement. The evolution of inspection and enforcement is most closely aligned to our building a more robust, risk-based inspection system. (See Attachment.)

This process can best be described by an illustration we have often used at FSIS. Namely, a more robust, risk-based system is a major structure built on a strong foundation with three pillars providing support. The pillars, taken together, maintain the system's integrity. The three pillars are: industry, FSIS personnel, and consumers.

The Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system is the core of the industry pillar, and FSIS has a vital role in educating, as well as regulating industry's ability to achieve a positive outcome. Industry, for its part, is responsible for designing and implementing an effective food safety system. In this regard, we have been enhancing our outreach efforts, especially to small and very small plants, which I will describe later in this document.

The FSIS personnel pillar is necessary so that we can collect, assess, and respond to public health data. Our verification must be uniform and consistent, especially in areas of greatest risk. Under a more robust, risk-based inspection system, we must use science as our guiding principal. In other words, we follow the core functions of the public health model – assessment, policy development, and assurance. Thus, the type and intensity of inspection at each plant would be determined by an analytical process which allows our inspectors to foresee problems so they can focus their efforts at plants and in processes that pose a public health risk. But in order to reach this point, we must develop a new system that will allow us to collect, assess, and respond to public health data. This need is emphasized in our budget request.

The third pillar is one which represents consumers. Consumers – including all of us here today regardless of title – need to have confidence in a safe and well-defended food supply.

As we move towards a more robust, risk-based inspection system, our goal is to ensure that we receive input from all stakeholders (industry, employees, and consumers) along every step of the process. We need to ensure that all food safety partners are aware of the expectations and goals

and have had the opportunity to provide input in moving towards a more robust, risk-based inspection system.

### **Risk-Based Pathogen Controls**

FSIS' *Listeria monocytogenes* verification sampling is a good example of how we have taken a more risk-based approach in processing plants. Under this initiative, FSIS tailors its verification activities to the interventions that plants choose to adopt and to the potential for *Listeria monocytogenes* growth in their products. In other words, FSIS conducts less sampling in those plants that have the best *Listeria monocytogenes* control programs and more sampling in plants that adopt less vigorous programs. Thus, plants have an incentive to do more to control *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Considering all the progress that has been made in reducing *Listeria monocytogenes*, *E. coli* O157:H7, *Campylobacter*, and other pathogens, FSIS believes that it is time to enhance the risk-based approach to investigating and controlling the incidence of *Salmonella* in meat, poultry, and egg products. *Salmonella* is the most frequently reported foodborne illness in the United States, causing culture proven cases of foodborne illness at a rate of 14.5 per 100,000 population. The Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Healthy People 2010 calls for a rate of *Salmonella* infections of 6.8 per 100,000 population. We have a long way to go.

*Salmonella* includes over 2,300 serotypes, all of which are considered pathogenic in humans. Although most of the reported cases in the United States are associated with a relatively small number of serotypes – some of which are commonly found in raw meat and poultry products –

there has been increasing concern about outbreaks attributed to relatively rare strains of *Salmonella* resistant to multiple antibiotics.

While the Agency responds quickly to positive findings of *Salmonella* linked to human illness at any establishment, our risk-based *Salmonella* approach for raw product would help us be proactive before human illness is associated with our regulated products rather than reactive. It is essential that FSIS proceeds with its new *Salmonella* performance measure because it more accurately reflects Agency performance in reducing foodborne illness and plant performance in reducing the pathogen in its processes. Our risk-based *Salmonella* approach would also provide us with an early warning capability for the high-risk *Salmonella* serotypes from meat, poultry, and egg products in particular geographic areas.

Our budget request would allow us to fully characterize isolates; initiate a Food Safety Assessment at a high-risk establishment before an outbreak occurs rather than as part of the investigation of why an outbreak has occurred; conduct more testing in areas where a cluster of serotypes is identified to determine if an unusual prevalence is occurring; and continually feed to CDC and State public health officials any data concerning patterns. We are requesting \$602,000 for this risk-based *Salmonella* approach.

In many ways, our foundational work has already started. We held public meetings to work with our stakeholders to find ways to reduce food safety hazards. In August 2005, for example, we held a public meeting on Advances in Pre-Harvest Reduction of *Salmonella* in Poultry in Athens, Georgia. The meeting, with over 208 participants, focused on research and practical experiences



aimed at reducing *Salmonella* at the poultry production level, or before poultry reaches Federally-inspected plants. Based on input from the meeting and other information available to us, we are developing compliance guideline materials for producers that address pre-harvest food safety and *Salmonella* control. We held a second public meeting on February 23 and 24, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, which outlined new approaches to in-plant controls for *Salmonella*. Approximately 150 attended the meeting, with close to 100 joining the meeting by phone or netcast; the netcast was available both days. This meeting discussed new FSIS actions for encouraging industry to control *Salmonella*. Both of these meetings served as important steps in our foundational work.

### **Funding Progress**

As a more robust, risk-based inspection system is the Agency's number one priority, we are requesting \$2.6 million for this risk-based effort in FY 2007. I will go over in more detail the specific funding needs for these efforts later when I review our budget request. However, it is worth highlighting here the following ways in which the Agency will prepare for the further evolution of the risk-based system through the improvement of Agency support:

- \$602,000 *Salmonella* risk-based inspection system approach described above.
- Advance risk-based inspection in processing establishments through reprogramming databases to better assess plant data to determine where to sample based on risks to public health.
- Development of risk-based verification strategies for meat, poultry, and egg products in commerce that can be used by FSIS personnel. We will collaborate with State, local, and

public health officials at the retail level to determine strategies for enhanced consumer protections within our regulatory framework. These activities would complement inspection activities performed in-plant.

- Use of data to base policies and regulations for inspection on information obtained that defines measures taken by establishments to reduce foodborne risks and the efficacy of measures implemented to reduce risk, e.g., pathogen reduction interventions.
- Use of new technologies to increase the effectiveness of the risk-based inspections that inspectors perform including such things as rapid tests for residues and microbes.

### **Training, Education, and Outreach**

The next priority I want to discuss is training, education, and outreach. Training is the foundation of our public health successes and a key element in our strategy to meet the Healthy People 2010 goals. All employees need to be equipped with the knowledge and technical expertise to operate within a public health framework, and the Agency has made great strides in achieving a well-trained workforce that is not only able to identify threats to the public health, but also to anticipate possible threats. We continue to have a need for training and are moving beyond the entry level and basic HACCP training provided to our workforce. As new employees join the Agency, they still require the basic training. With ongoing changes in policy, and as we move to a more robust, risk-based inspection system, new training and refresher training will be needed by all employees. Additionally, we are beginning to explore intermediate and advanced training opportunities for our employees. Based on new, innovative ways of reaching our employees, the Agency is using its existing budget to conduct this training.

It has been easier to reach our employees and provide them training with the implementation of our regional training system to deliver vital training courses closer to employees' worksites.

This innovative program ensures that our workforce receives critical scientific training in a timely manner. Providing this training efficiently and effectively has been a key element in the on-going reductions of foodborne pathogens.

Due to improvements FSIS has made to its training program, 100 percent of those hired as entry-level employees, as well as those who are promoted into inspection and enforcement occupations, now receive mission-critical training within one year of entering Agency duty. Many of these employees will receive the training within the first six months of being hired, or sooner.

FSIS' Food Safety Regulatory Essentials (FSRE) training program has equipped inspection program personnel in verifying an establishment's HACCP system. Customized HACCP training is then provided, based on the types of products being produced at the establishments where inspectors are assigned. Approximately 1,400 FSIS employees received FSRE training in FY 2005, and an additional 1,200 are slated to complete this customized job-training program this fiscal year. We continue to provide specialized training to our Public Health Veterinarians (PHVs), and this year, for the first time, this training will be required as a condition of employment, meaning that employees must successfully complete the curriculum in order to remain in our workforce. Since being launched in FY 2004, over 230 PHVs have received the nine-week classes. We plan to hold eight PHV training classes this year, reaching nearly 200 people.

We are also partnering with other Federal agencies to leverage resources for training. FSIS PHVs are trained to identify signs and symptoms during ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection that could potentially signify the presence of a foreign animal disease or suspicious condition, and they learn the appropriate response and reporting procedures. Working closely with our sister agency, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, we are developing a training module on this issue that is available anytime, anywhere through the Department's *AgLearn* system. The course is also currently available through CD-ROM.

In addition, we recognize that we employ individuals who must maintain their professional licenses. That is why we became a certified continuing education units outlet so that many of our courses can be utilized by the PHVs to obtain continuing education credit.

FSIS is also in the midst of a comprehensive, multi-year training and education effort designed to ensure that every FSIS employee fully understands their role in preventing, or responding to, an attack on the food supply. Efforts began in FY 2002 with food defense awareness training for supervisors. Since then, we have expanded with contracted anti-terrorism training that was provided to more than 5,000 field and headquarters employees. Food defense awareness training is also being conducted with local partners, such as State and local inspectors, in a cooperative effort with other Federal agencies (Food and Drug Administration, USDA/Food and Nutrition Service, and USDA/Agricultural Marketing Service).

With a regional approach to training, we have been able to deliver training faster and more efficiently to employees entering mission-critical occupations. Through e-learning techniques, we have been able to distribute training materials more rapidly to the workforce on vital issues such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) policy. Through a policy of training as a condition of employment, we have also been able to ensure that all employees have the competencies to perform successfully. The regional approach also allows us to better leverage our resources so that our trainers can also provide outreach and education to small and very small plants, as well as in the course of interacting with their FSIS colleagues.

FSIS is exploring a wide range of methods to reach its geographically dispersed workforce with on-going training updates. The newest vehicle FSIS has used is netcast. Most recently, Export Verification training was provided to inspection program personnel via netcast at establishments that produce beef products for export under Export Verifications programs.

We know that for a more robust, risk-based inspection system to be successful then all plants must have well-designed, food-safety systems. To that end, we have been enhancing our outreach efforts, especially to small and very small plants, to ensure everyone is meeting the same requirements. We are significantly changing the dynamic of our workforce in order to improve our outreach efforts in this area. It is clear to us from our existing communication efforts that effective outreach can lead to important changes in food safety designs by industry. Small and very small plants are also part of the industry pillar that supports a more robust, risk-based inspection system, and any performance gaps that exist between them and the larger plants needs to be closed.

One method we know is succeeding in this area is our actions following Food Safety Assessments (FSA), which have remained consistent over the past three years. For example, out of 1,501 FSAs conducted in 2005, 912 of the establishments were found in compliance. We believe we have a vital role in educating and regulating industry to achieve this outcome, so we are assessing all aspects of our industry outreach. In 2005, we held outreach and listening sessions with small and very small plants in Montana and California. Early this year, we held two more in Pennsylvania. From these sessions, we are gathering critical feedback to ensure plants do not fall behind in HACCP implementation.

FSIS recognized, based on responses and comments from the outreach/listening sessions, the need to update its outreach strategy from one focused on initial development of a HACCP plan, to one that is geared towards the scientific basis of the HACCP plan. In other words, we need to shift from “execution” of HACCP plans to “design” of those plans. FSIS especially wants to continue to work with small and very small plant owners and operators so they can continue to enhance the design of their food safety systems.

Ultimately, making certain that the Nation’s food supply is safe makes good business sense, as well as good public health. We realize plant owners and operators must have the necessary tools for success, so education through outreach is an important focus for us. Likewise, plant owners and operators must seek this education and these tools and follow them. If educational or training opportunities are repeatedly ignored then we have made it clear that public health is our responsibility and we will take regulatory action as necessary.

Most recently, the International HACCP Alliance hosted a strategy session attended by senior-level FSIS employees to discuss and discover the needs business owners, especially those of small and very small plants, have in relation to fully implementing HACCP. Both Dr. Raymond, Under Secretary for Food Safety, and I attended the meeting to show how important and valuable we view these sessions. The recommendations from this session are being included as part of an implementation plan by a group of senior-level FSIS employees. While the implementation plan is not yet finished, I can tell you that a uniform, consistent, and effective message regarding food safety regulations is a critical deliverable on the part of the Agency.

### **Consumer Education Initiatives**

In the area of consumer education this year, the Food Safety Mobile played perhaps our most prominent role when it visited the Hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast region. This eye-catching “food safety educator-on-wheels” brings important public health information to consumers and builds on our partnerships in grassroots communities across the country. Through the Food Safety Mobile, FSIS is sharing its food safety message with the public, especially culturally diverse and underserved populations and those with the highest risk from foodborne illnesses. In addition to dispensing important food safety tips in areas hit with power outages and water damage, the Food Safety Mobile distributed food safety brochures, bleach, hand wipes, and thermal bags. During its two-and-one half month tour of the Gulf States, the Food Safety Mobile reached nearly 41,000 total consumers face-to-face. In fact, the Food Safety Mobile was so successful that a second mobile was launched in October 2005, appearing at 18 events in 11

additional cities in Texas and Louisiana following Hurricane Rita. Food Safety Mobile II reached an additional 15,000 consumers affected by the hurricanes.

In another inter-agency collaborative effort to educate about the importance of food safety, FSIS is cosponsoring with the DHHS' Food and Drug Administration (FDA), CDC, and private sector organizations an international food safety education conference this September, focusing on reaching at-risk audiences. An unprecedented effort, the goals of the 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.

### **Food Defense**

The third priority is our substantial effort to continue to improve our food defense capabilities. The Agency has accomplished much in the area of food defense, making a strong system even stronger. The name of the office which handles this important area was changed from the Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness to the Office of Food Defense and Emergency Response. This reflects the fact that we have restructured the office to focus on developing strategies to protect and defend the food supply from intentional contamination and to respond to both intentional acts of adulteration, as well as large scale food emergencies.

Last year, FSIS developed four model food defense plans, which are available on our website. These models are designed to assist Federal- and State-inspected meat, poultry, and egg products



establishments, as well as import facilities, to develop their own defense measures to deter the threat of intentional contamination or similar attacks on the food supply. During 2005, the Agency held workshops on these plans in Dallas, TX; Oakland, CA; Chicago, IL; and Philadelphia, PA. In addition to webcasting the Oakland and Philadelphia workshops, FSIS also conducted four additional webcasts to ensure that as many people as possible had the opportunity to participate. Two of these webcasts were targeted specifically to State officials, and the Agency also partnered with the University of Puerto Rico in holding an entire webcast in Spanish, which also drew participants from Latin America. In all, it is estimated that these workshops reached over 1,200 people.

The model food defense plans have been issued in the form of guidance documents and are voluntary. However, FSIS believes that every establishment should have a written plan that describes and documents controls to ensure that the premises are defended from potential threats.

FSIS continues to assess vulnerabilities in the food supply. The Strategic Partnership Program on Agroterrorism, a program including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FDA, and Department of Homeland Security (DHS), along with FSIS and other USDA agencies, carries out joint vulnerability assessments on the food supply with industry and States, and we have been working in conjunction with the CDC, the FDA, epidemiologists, and public health laboratories in several States through the FoodNet and PulseNet programs. FSIS is also conducting an assessment of vulnerabilities of the food supply from illegally imported products.

The majority of the \$15.8 million increase in our FY 2007 food and agriculture defense budget request focuses on the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). FERN is a joint FSIS-FDA effort of national, State, and local laboratories to provide ongoing surveillance and monitoring of food and to promptly respond to an intentional contamination that targets the Nation's food supply, or a foodborne illness outbreak brought about by Mother Nature. To date, \$4 million in funding allocated in FY 2005 and FY 2006 has been used to build on the expertise of the Federal, State, and local laboratories that are now part of FERN, and these laboratories are currently conducting method development for testing and performing proficiency testing. FERN has also established five Regional Coordination Centers that serve as the primary points of contact for laboratories across the country.

This effort enables FSIS to utilize State and local laboratories in handling the numerous samples required to be tested in the event of an attack on the food supply, a natural outbreak, or even a hoax, involving a meat, poultry, or egg product. It is vital for the Agency to respond rapidly to such emergencies to not only protect the public's health, but also to ensure public confidence in the safety of the food supply and to prevent an economic collapse in the meat or poultry industries. The first line of this rapid response is the laboratories, which must be provided with training, methodology, and state-of-the-art laboratory equipment. Ultimately, our goal is to have 100 State and local laboratories actively testing the food supply for FERN, like the 18 FSIS-affiliated biological and eight FDA-affiliated chemical laboratories with which FERN now has cooperative agreements.

Another important example of inter-agency cooperation, and one that is designed to allow the FERN labs to test methods and proficiency, is a joint project between USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), and FSIS. Product samples will be taken from facilities in four States that provide ground beef to the National School Lunch Program. FSIS labs will test those samples for threat agents, in addition to the regular pathogen testing that is performed by AMS. Then, once that product has been sent to warehouses, it will then be retested for the same threat agents by non-FSIS labs in the FERN network that have a cooperative agreement with the FERN network. The project will be held later this year and is the first one to focus on FSIS-regulated products. Earlier projects held in November and December of 2004 tested FDA-regulated products.

### **Risk Analysis**

Fourth, is our risk analysis priority – which includes risk assessment, risk management, and risk communication. This is an extremely important process, one that provides FSIS with a way to focus resources on hazards that pose the greatest risk to public health.

A good risk assessment needs good data in order to be effective. Therefore, we are conducting a series of nationwide baseline studies that will help determine the levels of various pathogenic microorganisms in raw meat and poultry. These baseline studies are designed to provide FSIS and the regulated industry with data concerning the prevalence and quantitative levels of selected foodborne pathogens and microorganisms that serve as indicators of process control.

The first baseline study, which began in August and will continue to December 2006, is for *E. coli* O157:H7 and indicator organisms in beef trim and subprimals. Data from this study will guide Agency decisions on performance standards and allocation of inspection resources. In September of last year, a contract was awarded to a third-party laboratory to perform the microbial analyses for future baseline studies on: young chicken carcasses, ground chicken, and swine carcasses. From this, a new baseline study for young chicken carcasses will be initiated within the next few months. The young chicken baseline will include prevalence and quantified levels for both *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. This scientific information will allow FSIS to make the decisions necessary to move to a more robust, risk-based inspection system.

Regarding BSE, USDA has contracted with Harvard University to update its risk assessment to ensure previous measures implemented through the interim final rules were appropriate. USDA is drafting a final rule based on the comments received on the interim final rule, the results of the updated Harvard Risk Assessment and results of the USDA enhanced surveillance program.

During the past year, FSIS assumed the Chair of the USDA Food Safety Risk Assessment Committee (FSRAC), whose purpose is to enhance communication and coordination among USDA agencies, to promote sound risk assessments in support of food safety policy, and regulatory decisions. FSIS also became the co-lead for the Interagency Risk Assessment Consortium to share information and coordinate food safety risk assessment approaches among 18 Federal agencies, including DHHS, the Department of Defense, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

## **Management Controls and Efficiency**

Our fifth priority is management controls and efficiency, which is a priority we added as a mechanism to best achieve our operational goals and objectives within each program area. Every task undertaken by the Agency has an effect on public health. Because of this, we are requiring each program area to illustrate through documentation that they are meeting their established goals.

In order to ensure that proper management controls are implemented, FSIS' Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement, and Review (OPEER) branch will audit all Agency program areas to measure the outcomes. In FY 2005, the Agency began development of a two-phase management control audit protocol and agenda to systematically verify and evaluate management controls. Phase 1 will verify the implementation of the management controls for each program area; Phase 2 will verify that each program is achieving its objectives, and that their controls are adequate and are achieving the program's desired results.

During FY 2005, we developed and implemented management controls that established operational performance standards for verification of HACCP requirements, ante-mortem/post-mortem requirements, Food Safety Assessments, administrative enforcement actions, food defense verification, and recall procedures.

FSIS launched the AssuranceNet project team in FY 2006. This team is developing a state-of-the-art management control reporting system that will tie into key Agency databases. The AssuranceNet team collects information on Agency management controls and the items the

Agency needs in the way of a reporting tool. The team is working with Agency technical staff and outside contractors to develop the system according to industry standards and best practices. The AssuranceNet system will undergo extensive real world testing before it becomes fully available for use in June 2006.

An area of management efficiency which we at FSIS emphasize is human resources (HR) modernization and reform. In 2004, FSIS launched an initiative to reshape the HR system to better support our human capital and strategic plans and to facilitate every-day mission performance. The resulting internal work group has developed innovative HR practices that can be implemented under current law, as well as identifying innovations that require Federal legislation or regulatory changes. We stand committed to the belief that the Agency requires an alternative HR system that emphasizes pay-for-performance.

### **Public Health Communications Infrastructure**

Our sixth priority is the public health communications infrastructure with the ability to collect, assess, and respond to data in real-time. Because this is also a foundation of a more robust, risk-based inspection system, we are constantly looking for ways to improve communication within the Agency, between the Agency and its stakeholders, as well as cross-Agency communications. FSIS is examining its data needs to make our field operations more effective. Having the same data from the border, the districts, and field and laboratory personnel at the same time is essential so that everyone can connect the dots and proactively respond to this wealth of information rather than just react after a problem surfaces. Proactively interpreting our data will better

protect public health from the prospect of non-intentional or intentional contamination. By collecting, assessing, and responding to data in real time, lives can be saved.

A key part of this process is through the effective management of information technology (IT). Through an Enterprise Architecture Working Group, we have been working closely with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and others involved in the Federal-government wide e-Government efforts to develop IT systems that facilitate cross-Agency analysis and identification of duplicative investments, gaps and opportunities for collaboration within and across agencies.

Another way we are working to enhance cross-Agency communication in FY 2007 is to create electronic linkages with the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection's International Trade Data System in order to provide FSIS with a stronger ability to screen and verify the security of products imported into the United States in an efficient way. FSIS is also working with its Federal partners through the Federal Health Architecture initiative to build a system that all Federal agencies can communicate through to better protect imported products.

On the Agency level, FSIS is working to have electronically stored information from all FSIS personnel integrated and available in real-time, allowing managers and administrators to make management decisions more efficiently as events are unfolding and with greater access to information. This is necessary for our inspection program personnel to do their jobs properly and effectively and to react more rapidly in a crisis to better protect public health and save lives.

An example of this was shown in a recent test of an updated version of our Consumer Complaint Monitoring System (CCMS). When implemented later this year, this new version of CCMS will include improved scientific tools to enable us to act more quickly to prevent further foodborne illness. In one scenario, as we were testing this new version of CCMS, we were able to find an *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak three weeks faster than with our present technology. FSIS is partnering with States to integrate this system so that this real-time data could be accessed and shared by all to help prevent outbreaks and/or limit their scope. Other aspects would also include procuring PDA-type hardware and related software integrating into existing Agency computer and communications equipment for inspection program personnel. It also includes keeping up with rapid changes in microcomputer technology.

We believe these efforts to improve upon the Agency's IT systems will greatly enhance the Agency's efforts to support the President's Management Agenda, and move us towards more efficient e-Government solutions to the challenges we face.

### **InsideFSIS Debuts**

Other ways that we have improved our communications includes *InsideFSIS*, the Agency's employee intranet which was launched in June. With *InsideFSIS*, employees are able to gain instant access to important Agency information and may participate in netcasts, as was the case with a State of the Agency meeting held in September last year. We also have an extensive food handlers' education program that encompasses everything from bilingual pamphlets on using thermometers to our Food Safety Mobile.



I have already mentioned the prominent role the Food Safety Mobile played on the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast, but the Food Safety Mobile was not the only way the Agency played an important role in our strategy to respond to the hurricanes. Prior to both hurricanes' landfalls, FSIS issued videotaped consumer alerts with food safety tips following a power outage or flood that were satellite broadcast to media outlets in Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, and Florida. In addition, the Agency's Meat and Poultry Hotline began 24-hour service to handle any food safety questions from consumers. Our outreach to American consumers continued into September, when FSIS recorded and distributed public service announcements offering food safety tips.

### **FY 2007 Budget Request**

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss FSIS' priorities with you. Now, I would like to present an overview of the FY 2007 budget requests for FSIS. These budget initiatives are vital to helping us attain FSIS' public health mission, as outlined by our priorities. In FY 2007, FSIS is requesting an appropriation of \$862.9 million.

### **Risk-Based System**

FSIS is seeking a total increase of \$2.6 million for the improvement of Agency support for risk-based inspection and risk-based *Salmonella* control. We are requesting \$1.9 million for Agency support of risk-based inspection. Finally, for our risk-based *Salmonella* approach, we are requesting \$602,000.

## **Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative**

The FY 2007 budget also requests a total increase of \$15.8 million for FSIS to support the Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative in partnership with other USDA agencies, the DHHS, and the Department of Homeland Security. Because food contamination and animal and plant diseases could have catastrophic effects on human health and the economy, the three Federal departments involved are working together on a comprehensive food and agriculture policy that will enrich the Government's ability to respond to the dangers of disease, pests, and poisons, whether natural or intentionally introduced. The total is broken down as follows:

Central to FSIS' food defense efforts is FERN, for which we are seeking an increase of \$13 million. These funds are critical to help FSIS provide participating laboratories with the necessary training, laboratory equipment and supplies so that we can handle surge capacity, whether from events stemming from a hoax, intentional acts or mother nature. 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.

We are also requesting \$2.5 million for two data systems to support FERN – the electronic laboratory exchange network (eLEXNET), and a repository of analytical methods. The eLEXNET is a national, web-based, electronic data reporting system that allows analytical laboratories to rapidly report and exchange standardized data. This system is currently operational in nearly 100 food-testing, public health, and veterinary diagnostic laboratories across the country. The FY 2007 budget request would make eLEXNET available to additional

FERN and other analytical, food-testing laboratories. This will require eLEXNET system management, travel, on-site computer programming, and training.

Access to current, properly validated methods used for screening, confirmation, and forensic analysis is critical to all laboratories. For this reason, FSIS is working with FDA to develop a Web-based repository of analytical methods compatible to eLEXNET. Access to these methods will greatly enhance the ability of FERN and other laboratories to respond to emergencies, to use new methodologies and technologies, to enhance efficiency, and to trouble-shoot problems. The requested funding will be used to enhance the repository and to populate the repository with numerous methods that will be obtained from analytical laboratories.

### **Communication**

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 Import Trade Data System managed by the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection. Currently, FSIS relies on the importer of record to present shipments for reinspection, and the lack of network linkages among import data systems maintained by different agencies contributes to a prolonged, sometimes incomplete rendering of product dispositions and document certification for imported meat and poultry products at U.S. ports of entry.

We are also requesting funds 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. For inspector communication enhancements, such as the PDA-type hardware for inspectors mentioned earlier, we are seeking \$615,000.

Our experience has shown that the originally postulated life cycle of five years for microcomputers delivered to the field inspection workforce is not practical, given the rapid pace of technological changes. To replace a five-year lifecycle for computer hardware with a three-year lifecycle, the Agency seeks \$1,271,000. This accounts for the approximately 4,000 microcomputers in the field. Our goal is to replace 1,300 to 1,400 computers annually.

### **Personnel Pay Increase**

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.

### **User Fee Proposal**

Once again this year, our budget repropose the implementation of a new user fee. As you know, inspection services for the cost of Federal meat, poultry, and egg products during all approved shifts are currently paid for with Federal funds, provided that the species or product is covered under our legislative authority. However, most plants run beyond one eight-hour shift per day. A fee for services beyond that would save significant Federal costs by transferring these costs to

the industries that directly benefit from them. The proposed FY 2007 savings are projected at \$105.4 million to reflect collections of receipts for three quarters of the year.

### **Closing**

As we mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the FMIA, FSIS 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, as we have in the past, in as transparent and inclusive a manner as possible. The strategies I discussed today will help FSIS continue to pursue its goals and achieve its mission of reducing foodborne illness, and protecting public health through food safety and defense.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to speak 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 and ensuring that we continue to have the safest food in the world.

## The Three Pillars of FSIS' Enhanced Risk-Based Inspection System

