

FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE

**Statement of Philip Derfler, Deputy Administrator
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies**

Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Farr, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Philip Derfler, Deputy Administrator of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the status of the agency's work to ensure the safety of meat, poultry, and processed egg products and to prevent foodborne illness.

Who We Are

FSIS is the public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) responsible for ensuring that the nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products, whether domestic or imported, is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.

The dedicated men and women of FSIS carry out our vital mission all across the nation. At the end of fiscal year 2013, the agency employed 9,436 employees (or 9,262 FTEs), 8,004 of whom work on the front lines protecting public health at either one of the 6,427 federally regulated establishments, in-commerce facilities, or one of the three FSIS laboratories. Our scientists analyzed more than 100,000 samples in FY 2013 to ascertain the presence of pathogens in the meat, poultry, and processed egg supply. In addition, inspectors remained vigilant at 127 ports of entry and in 150,000 in-commerce facilities nationwide.

We are now operating under our third Annual Performance Plan (APP) guided by the FY 2011-2016 Strategic Plan. The APP provides the American public and FSIS employees with a clear list of Agency priorities and a detailed roadmap of the steps we intend to take this year to achieve our mission. It outlines an operational plan that we are following in order to steer the Agency as

we work to prevent foodborne illness and protect public health. It provides managers and stakeholders with a wide range of Agency actions and activities that are traceable and transparent, so that we can remain accountable to the Subcommittee and the American public.

What We Do

Federal Inspection of Domestic Products

Our mission is unique because much of it is mandated by law. FSIS enforces the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA) and the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA), which require the examination and inspection of all livestock and poultry slaughtered and processed for use in human food. FSIS also enforces the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA), which requires that livestock be handled and slaughtered humanely. Livestock and poultry slaughter operations cannot operate without the presence of inspection personnel, and inspection personnel must also be present at least once-per-shift for meat and poultry processing operations. During FY 2013, FSIS personnel inspected about 148 million head of livestock and 9 billion poultry carcasses.

Under the Egg Products Inspection Act, FSIS also inspects establishments that produce egg products. Egg products are primarily used as ingredients in other foods, such as prepared mayonnaise and ice cream, as well as by the food service industry, including hospitals and schools. During FY 2013, FSIS personnel inspected about 4 billion pounds of processed egg products.

Federal Inspection of Imported Products

FSIS also regulates all imported meat, poultry, and processed egg products intended for use as human food. Before FSIS-regulated products can enter the country, the agency determines whether the food safety regulatory system of any country that wishes to export to the U.S. is equivalent to that of the U.S. Once FSIS finds a foreign country's system for meat, poultry, or egg products to be equivalent, FSIS inspects eligible products from that country at U.S. ports-of-entry.

During FY 2013, FSIS personnel inspected approximately 3 billion pounds of meat and poultry products presented for import by 28 actively exporting foreign countries, including approximately 10 million pounds of processed egg products presented for import from Canada.

The agency evaluates an exporting country's food safety system on an ongoing basis. Each year, FSIS reviews any changes in the foreign country's food safety system. In addition, FSIS may conduct an in-country audit of the system and will review the country's performance in port-of-entry inspections. Based on these reviews, the agency decides whether the country is maintaining equivalence, or whether additional agency action is warranted. This performance-based approach allows FSIS to direct its resources to foreign food regulatory systems that potentially pose a risk to public health and makes its international program more consistent with its domestic inspection system. Finally it improves the linkage between port-of-entry re-inspection and on-site audits. During FY 2013, FSIS conducted on-site verification audits of 12 countries that are eligible to export meat, poultry, or processed egg products to the United States and identified no significant equivalence concerns in these countries.

Cooperative State Inspection

FSIS also assesses the safety of State-inspected meat and poultry products through cooperative agreements with State Departments of Agriculture.

FSIS cooperates with 27 States to develop and administer State meat and poultry inspection (MPI) programs that implement food safety requirements that are "at least equal to" Federal requirements at about 1,700 establishments. These establishments can only ship or sell products within their State. FSIS completed comprehensive reviews of meat and poultry inspections programs for Kansas, Missouri, Minnesota, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The agency also obtained self-assessment reviews of the other 21 MPI programs.

FSIS also cooperates with three States — Ohio, North Dakota, and Wisconsin — to operate a new interstate shipment program, as provided for in the 2008 Farm Bill. This approach eliminates barriers allowing small State-inspected businesses to expand their customer base and

explore new markets, by making these establishments eligible to ship meat and poultry products to different States and thereby promoting small business growth.

Targeting and Leveraging Resources

FSIS is instrumental in helping reduce the level of foodborne illness by targeting common and dangerous pathogens, thereby reducing their prevalence in finished food products. We will continue to improve, innovate, and modernize our approach as we coordinate the development of policies with other USDA agencies and Federal agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as foreign governments and international organizations to ensure an integrated farm-to-table approach to food safety.

By revising current procedures and removing outdated regulatory requirements that do not help combat foodborne illness, the agency will make more efficient and effective use of taxpayer dollars. We are confident that our proposed rule on poultry slaughter modernization will reduce the risk of foodborne illness by focusing FSIS inspection activities on those tasks that advance FSIS' core mission of food safety. And, through our expanded Public Health Information System (PHIS), our personnel are able to rely on more powerful tools to do their job.

Consumer Outreach

In addition to doing everything we can to make sure that food is safe before it enters commerce and as it moves in commerce, we feel it is also our responsibility to give consumers the tools that they need to handle food safely at home. This is why in FY 2013, FSIS expanded its placement of food safety education videos at check-out monitors at several nationwide retailers, reaching nearly 72 million customers. We also doubled our FY 2012 public education targets to at-risk and vulnerable audiences. And our "Cook it Safe!" public service announcements registered more than 38 million impressions.

To better reach consumers on their terms and ensure that our food safety messages are better received by a larger audience, FSIS also utilizes various social media avenues to broadcast key food safety messages, such as news about recalls and information on safe food handling

practices. FSIS actively disseminates food safety messages through Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube. For example, the @USDAFoodSafety Twitter account had 466,000 followers at the end of FY 2013, representing a 40 percent increase over FY 2012. We are able to reach nearly half a million followers with each tweet.

More and more, we are using mobile technology to reach consumers where they are, whether they are at the grocery store, in the kitchen, or at the grill. FSIS continues to field safe food handling questions through Ask Karen. The number of views of Ask Karen answers increased from about 1.1 million in FY 2012 to approximately 2.4 million in FY 2013. Not only does the messaging reach more consumers; it requires fewer staff hours to operate than a hotline. This effort also supports the Administration's management agenda, particularly the goal of providing effective customer service by making it faster or easier to complete transactions with government.

Conclusion

We are continually looking at the FSIS organization and challenging ourselves to modernize the agency by taking advantage of current science and technology to create a food safety system geared for the 21st century.

Our inspection force works very hard, under difficult conditions, often for long hours and on the road away from their families. We take our mission seriously and understand the importance of our role in ensuring the safety of the nation's food supply. We are one team, with one purpose, working toward a common and extremely important goal. Thank you for the opportunity to report on the status of FSIS programs and the important work that our employees do every day to protect public health.