

2003 FSIS Diversity Conference Parking Lot Items and Responses

1. When will the Agency's website get much needed upgrades?

The redesign of FSIS' website is underway now. Many employees from across the agency have already participated in this exciting process, for example, by participating in visioning sessions or providing input to the audience analysis. At this point, the new design is expected to launch mid-to late January.

Note that the FSIS project parallels the web redesign effort for the Department. FSIS will be the first of the 29 USDA agencies to follow Enterprise-wide web presence standards, so we are somewhat dependent on the timeline for the USDA redesign. That effort has been underway for some time and is on schedule.

2. What is the Status of the Food Safety Education Program?

The Food Safety Education Program (FSEP) will no longer be offered in its previous form. Currently the Training and Education Workgroup (TEWG) is reviewing all Agency education programs and associated funding to assess their currency and accessibility by the FSIS workforce.

3. Where will the training centers be located?

The first five regional training sites will be located in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Dallas, Des Moines and Boulder. Each of the five locations will have one Regional Public Health Training Coordinator assigned. This "Regional Trainer" will conduct classes at various locations within the training region to meet training needs when and where they arise. For FY04, they will concentrate their efforts on providing training to entering Food Inspectors, Veterinary Medical Officers, and the Food Safety Regulatory Essentials training.

4. Will Field Automation Information Management training stay at Texas A&M?

FAIM training will continue to be delivered via contract with Texas A&M University.

5. Will all food inspectors receive Bio-Terrorism and Professionalism training? If so, when?

Anti-terrorism and professionalism training for inspectors is being conducted by facilitators in each district and is being managed by the Office of Field Operations. These sessions are currently underway and are scheduled by District Offices. The training began in FY03 and will continue throughout FY04. As of October 1st, over 1,400 inspectors had received this training. It is an 8 hour training session that takes place at the plant. In addition to the inspector training, District Offices are receiving some specialized anti-terrorism training, along with the TSC, and Headquarters programs. We anticipate completion of this effort by the end of FY04.

6. What is OFO doing to recruit and keep a diverse workforce?

OFO has been recruiting CSOs and VMOs as students to try and gain their interest early in the process. For CSOs, particular emphasis is on Universities and Colleges that primarily serve minority students. Additionally, OFO is working with HRD on succession planning to ensure we are able to maintain our best and brightest employees. We recognize by doing this, we will be successful in maintaining a diverse workforce.

7. Morale is very low in the field among food inspectors; we have to fight the plant and lately our own management.

What is being done to boost the morale of the field inspectors?

Multiple initiatives are underway that should assist in boosting the morale of FSIS field employees. Training has become the number one initiative for the Agency. Over 800 employees were provided Food Safety Regulatory Essentials last fiscal year. Eight additional classes are scheduled for October through December. The FSIS Senior Management Council is looking into ways to best ensure employees at all levels receive updates on current issues within the Agency.

How can the Agency make the field inspector's job a joy to perform instead of a prison sentence? Examples: We read about all the awards management receives, but very little if anything about the accomplishments of the field inspector.

OFO Excellence Awards, FSIS Directive 4451.10, Rev 2, were revised this year to ensure that all levels of inspection personnel could be submitted for recognition for excellence by OFO management. Teams made up of exclusively by in-plant field employees will be recognized later this year.

The scientific endeavors that were implemented into the Agency are great. But that has nothing to do with employee morale in OFO. How our employees feel about their job is a very important part in making our Agency a premier Public Health Agency.

See above. In addition, OFO will be training all of their VMOs in Enforcement Investigation and Analysis (EIA) training by 2007.

8. Why can't there be an upward mobility C.O. position in the Albany District Office? There have been several of these in other locations – 3 in the state of Pennsylvania – but none in Albany. (Albany is one of the largest Districts and currently has 2 C.O. vacancies.)

The Albany Office is not filling any Compliance Officer positions at the GS-11 level which is where the upward mobility positions were announced. Albany could fill a CSO/EIAO position through the upward mobility process however, a candidate must possess the 30 hour educational requirement. The vacancies cited in this question were prior to the recent reorganization and prior to the introduction of the CSO/EIAO positions. Albany's current management is a strong proponent of the upward mobility program, and history shows they have hired and obtained upward mobility positions in other FSIS areas.

9. A recent article in the Washington Post newspaper indicated that although the Hispanic community continues to grow, that growth is not reflected the Federal government's workforce.

What quantifiable steps is FSIS taking today to position itself as the employer of choice within the Federal government for Hispanics?

- *FSIS recruiters have participated in 73 job fairs at colleges and conventions, which included Hispanic Servicing Institutions. Ten percent of the 70 students FSIS hired were Hispanic.*
- *The Agency has continued a successful partnership with the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) and participated in two campus career fairs. One CSO student trainee is a UPR student.*

- *FSIS has advertised in a variety of diversity publications including, Presna Latina and Hispanic Today.*
- *The Behavioral Event Interviewing training will be expanded to focus on employees. Participation in this training will allow employees an opportunity to better prepare for job interviews at the higher grade levels. In addition, it will help to increase employees' understanding of the methodology.*
- *About two years ago, FSIS established a Hispanic Focus Group charged with addressing Hispanic hiring, career advancement and retention. The focus group recently submitted a report covering these issues to management officials. In addition, they have developed an Agency Hispanic web site which will be used as a source of information to FSIS' internal and external customers. The web site has been approved and will be released with the newly reconstructed FSIS web site. The Agency's HEP Manager is a key member of the focus group.*

10. Will managers have required elements based upon measurable EEO elements?

In September 1994, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued a requirement that performance expectations for civil rights be incorporated into an existing or newly established critical performance element(s) for all supervisory and nonsupervisory employees. As a result, the requirement for a separate and critical equal opportunity and civil rights (EO/CR) performance element has been eliminated.

11. What is the role of the Office of Public Affairs, Education and Outreach (OPAEO)?

The creation of four new program areas under the direction of Assistant Administrators will improve the way FSIS staffs work toward the single purpose of ensuring food safety. The four new program areas will direct functions that involve all program areas. These new "cross cutting" functions will ensure that FSIS operates as a cohesive and coordinated unit to accomplish our food safety mission.

For example, the Office of Public Affairs, Education and Outreach (OPAEO) will increase the efficiency and strength of FSIS' internal and external communication, outreach and partnerships. This office combines traditional communication activities, such as those conducted by the Agency's Congressional and Public Affairs, Food Safety Education, and Executive Management Staffs, with outreach conducted by the Strategic Initiatives, Partnerships and Outreach Staff (SIPOS). SIPOS includes the Meat and Poultry Advisory Committee Staff, the Planning Staff, small and very small plant outreach and works with members of Federal, state and local governments.

The Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness (OFSEP) includes activities that directly and efficiently align bio-terrorist planning and response within the agency. The OFSEP will work closely with the Office of Public Health Science (OPHS) Bio-Sciences Division and link all other programs within FSIS to facilitate an immediate food safety response to all manner of threats to the country's farm-to-table food chain.

The Office of International Affairs (OIA) centralizes the Agency's activities related to regulation of imported meat, poultry, and egg products and certification of exports. This includes representation in international settings where FSIS influences and directs activities that establish food safety standards and promotes improved food safety practices worldwide.

The fourth new program area, the Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement and Review (OPEER) will enhance the Agency's evaluation, review, assessment, investigation, enforcement,

and audit capability by serving as the Agency's quality control team. This office's mission is to ensure that effectiveness, efficiency, consistency and accountability become the rule at FSIS. The OPEER quality assurance program ensures that FSIS functions, such as reviews of plants for compliance and food safety investigations, are carried out in a way most conducive to protecting the public health. This office also conducts audits of foreign country inspection systems, reviews, assessments, and program evaluations in an effort to ensure that the programs are performing as needed. The work of the field Program Investigators in OPEER places them on a daily basis in close proximity to performance and compliance problems and concerns at the in-plant level, which affords FSIS the ability to deal with the necessary adjustments and problems in a much more immediate fashion than in the past. OPEER was formed because a strong quality assurance program that uses reviews, evaluations, and audits as its tools can have a significant impact on management effectiveness, efficiency and policy development.

12. Is there a website and/or 800 number where we can call for help to learn more about diversity and how to include everyone from supervisors down to field employees and establishment managers and employees to understand behaviors and treat everyone the same everyday with the respect they deserve?

Response: FSIS has purchased a premium subscription to Diversityinc.com. This website provides current information on a variety of subjects that impact workforce diversity. The subscription is available to all managers, supervisors, team leaders, and other agency personnel. Interested employees should send an email to: Cynthia.Mercado@fsis.usda.gov for information to access Diversityinc.com.

The Agency's Civil Rights Division has several videos covering workforce diversity and other related subjects. They are an excellent resource to help enhance communication and improve behavior. These videos are available on loan to show at meetings, training, and special events. Please contact the Civil Rights Division at (301) 504-7755 for video information.

13. What other activities/events does FSIS promote to recognize diversity in its workplace?

National Special Emphasis Program (SEP) Managers plan, promote and implement special observances events and/or activities for all employees within FSIS. They partner with the Department and other components within USDA to carry out a national theme for these special observances. Listed below are various times and events that are periodically held throughout the year within headquarters, but almost all national SEP Managers provide some type of awareness information to FSIS employees via computer Users Notices. Managers and supervisors in other FSIS Program areas, Staffs, and Districts are encouraged to plan activities for special observances. Most of these managers/supervisors utilizes their EEO Advisory Committees, EEO Liaison Person, and/or SEP Managers to recognize diversity and to coordinate and implement special observances that are conducive to their work place.

Special Observances

Event Dates

-- Disability Employment Awareness Month	October 2003
-- American Indian/Alaska Native Observance	November 2003
-- Martin L. King, Jr. Celebration	January 15, 2004
-- African American Heritage Month	February 2004
-- Women's History Month	March 2004
-- Take our Children to Work Day	April 2004 (4 th Thurs.)
-- Asian American/Pacific Islanders Heritage	May 2004
-- National Pride Month	June 2004
-- Women's Equality Day	August 26, 2004
-- Hispanic Heritage Month	Sept. 15-Oct. 15, 2004

14. What other measures/session(s) throughout the year will FSIS be taking that relate to diversity?

FSIS personnel are represented on the seven USDA Diversity/Employee Advisory Councils. These councils were established by the Secretary of Agriculture to provide advice and develop recommendations that will enhance employment and career development opportunities, as well as create a positive work environment for all USDA personnel. You can access a list of the seven USDA councils at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/om/crd/toc.htm> . The list includes the names and telephone numbers of the USDA program manager for each council and the FSIS member and alternate on each council.

15. Is diversity important to the goals and initiatives of top management?

Diversity is an integral part of top management's goals and initiatives. Examples include: a) annual recruitment activities at colleges and universities where there is a diverse pool of potential applicants; b) employment of student interns and participation in a variety of student employment programs; c) participation in career fairs held during national conferences sponsored by organizations that advocate workforce diversity, such as the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences annual conference; d) implementation of quality of work life programs that recognize a diverse workforce has different issues and needs; and e) ensuring that diversity is a subject addressed during supervisory and leadership training activities.

15. Can you give an overview of what FSIS is doing to increase employment of people with disabilities?

Using schedule "A" hiring authority, the Department's Disability Employment Program Manager provides FSIS with the applications of individuals across the country who are interested in employment. Based on the location in which they are interested in being employed as well as the type of employment, those applications are forwarded to either the headquarters or the field human resources servicing office, as appropriate. The human resources specialist alerts the hiring manager that the applicant is an individual with a disability who can be hired under one of the special hiring authorities, not limited to Schedule A.

Examples of disability-recruitment/outreach initiatives -

- Worked with OPM to set up a special Food Inspector test on a number of occasions where applicants required special accommodations*
- In FY 02, maintained contacts with a variety of organizations in order to obtain referrals of disabled veterans for vacant positions. Among these contacts were state job services offices, the Department of Veterans Administration Vocational Rehabilitation Centers, and State vocational rehabilitation agencies.*
- Participated at job fairs focused on persons with disabilities. This included the National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (NISH) National Training Conference in Orlando, FL and the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) Conference in Crystal City, VA. In FY 03, placed an advertisement in Veterans Vision magazine to advertise Agency positions and solicit applications.*

-hiring into all occupations, particularly in-plant (where disability won't seriously jeopardize employee safety)

- There were 686 employees with disabilities in FSIS in FY 03 (602 PFT). There were 524 in-plant employees (458 PFT).*
- Hired one student in both FY 02 and FY 03 under the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for Students with Disabilities*

- *Full consideration was given to veterans with service-connected disabilities solicited and referred through delegated examining activities.*
- *Consideration was also given to veterans under merit promotion procedures who met the requirements of the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act (VEOA)*

16. How can employees help the Agency increase employment and awareness of disability issues?

It is believed that managers with hiring authority are best positioned to increase employment of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, encouraging the coworkers of employees with disabilities to speak about the merits of their co-workers may also be beneficial and reduce the apprehension of working with an employee with a disability. (Please see the article in the October 2003 Beacon.)