

# **National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection**

## **Briefing Paper for the Committee**

### **Biosecurity Readiness of FSIS Laboratories**

#### **Purpose:**

To provide an update on the FSIS laboratory system activities for identification of biosecurity threats and ensuring that resources are available to effectively manage emergencies and biosecurity events that threaten the safety of the nation's food supply.

#### **Main Points:**

The FSIS laboratories provide analytical support to the FSIS inspection force, feedback information on the effectiveness of policy implementation, and the capability to detect and respond to potentially threatening foodborne agents. With locations in Georgia, Missouri and California, the three field service laboratories (FSL) deliver chemistry, microbiology, and pathology data that the Agency needs to fulfill its public health mission. The laboratories are ISO 17025 accredited by the American Association of Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA). The laboratories are developing and implementing a comprehensive electronic laboratory information management system (LIMS). The LIMS will provide the basis for a broader integration of information resources within and outside the Agency and support the quality assurance accreditation program.

A number of initiatives are underway to further ensure the readiness of the FSIS laboratory system for emergency response. The laboratories have validated multiple new analytical methods to detect threat agents, including pathogens, chemicals and toxins. Work continues on validation methods for additional chemicals and pathogens identified as priorities and to maintain ongoing testing programs. During Operation Liberty Shield, FSL increased the capacity to test for threat agents while maintaining the routine food safety analyses.

The FSLs added the ability to screen for radiological contamination on all incoming materials, including sample boxes, supplies and mail. Laminar flow hoods are being installed to enable controlled opening of sample boxes and other items received.

The construction of the Biosecurity Level 3 (BSL-3) laboratory in Athens, Georgia, was completed in April 2004. The enhanced infrastructure will support increased surge capacity, method validation, and threat agent studies. The laboratory is designed to facilitate microbiological and chemical analyses of samples potentially contaminated with threat agents. The facility is equipped with state-of-the-art food protection technology.

Continuation of Operation Plans (COOP) were developed for the overall laboratory system and customized for each facility. Contacts for emergency response in each location were initiated and documented. Standard operating procedures were defined to provide guidance in emergency situations.

Emergency response drills and exercises are being conducted monthly to identify gaps and strengths in the system. Reports of lessons learned are used to improve the ability of the laboratories to react to an incident.

FSIS is co-chairing, with the Food and Drug Administration, the development and implementation of the organizational structure and functions of the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). FERN is responsible for integrating the nation's laboratory infrastructure for detection of threat agents in food at the state and federal levels. FERN will build the capacity of state and federal labs to conduct counterterrorism surveillance and emergency response activities. FSIS will provide training, establish surveillance methodologies and proficiency tests, and other support for detection of threat agents.

Laboratories are being identified and recruited for the network and their capacity to perform needed functions is being evaluated. The goal is to include all major food laboratories in the network.

The FSIS laboratories are members of the Laboratory Response Network (LRN) and collaborate with the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN). These networks, including FERN, provide laboratory support in the event of a national emergency.

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