

# National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection

## Update on Legislative Fiscal Year 2004-2005

On January 23, 2004, FSIS was appropriated approximately \$780 million for Fiscal Year 2004 as part of the Omnibus Appropriations Bill. The increase in appropriations for FSIS included \$4.25 million to hire additional in-plant inspectors, \$1.777 million to hire additional foreign program auditors to increase the number of equivalency review trips, \$1.65 million to establish a continuous baseline program for risk assessments and performance measurement, \$5.65 million to improve the scientific and surveillance skills of the workforce through training initiatives, \$4.46 million to increase sampling for pathogens and to develop laboratory capability to respond to chemical terrorism, and \$750,000 to design a mass media campaign aimed at improving the safe food handling habits of consumers at home.

### FY 2005 Initiatives

For FY 2005, FSIS has requested a program level of \$951.7 million, a net increase of about \$61 million from the enacted level for FY 2004. Under current law, the agency is requesting an appropriation of \$838.7 million, with an additional \$113 million in existing user fees. In addition to supporting the agency's basic mission of providing continuous food safety inspection in each meat, poultry, and egg products establishment in the U.S., the FY 2005 budget request will also fund increased BSE surveillance programs, as well as additional training for inspection personnel and numerous programs that will continue to keep FSIS among the leading public health agencies in the world.

The FY 2005 budget requests a \$23.5 million increase to support a food and agriculture defense initiative in partnership with USDA, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Homeland Security. The three Federal Departments involved are working together to create a comprehensive food and agriculture policy that will improve the government's ability to respond to the dangers of disease, pests and poisons, whether natural or intentionally introduced. A major component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is the expansion of the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). FERN was formed in 2002 and currently includes FSIS, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of HHS, and State labs capable of conducting food testing and forensic analysis for a wide variety of chemical, biological and radiological agents. Because a nationwide laboratory system with sufficient capacity to meet the needs of anticipated emergencies is integral to any bioterrorism surveillance and monitoring system, FERN will be expanded to contract with State and local laboratories, and to establish five regional hubs and a National Operating Center to coordinate FERN's efforts and conduct training. In addition, FSIS would also fund the establishment of five to seven State laboratories for screening of microbiological agents, with more laboratories in the future, based on the availability of funds. The budget request would also make the electronic laboratory exchange network (eLEXNET) available to additional FERN and other food-testing laboratories nationwide. eLEXNET is a national, web-based, electronic data reporting system that allows analytical laboratories to rapidly report and exchange standardized data.

Two critical elements of FSIS' mission are to continue the enforcement of humane slaughter regulations and to provide for the full cost of front-line inspection. The FY 2005 budget request

includes a \$17.3 million increase for humane slaughter enforcement and the full cost of in-plant inspection. Included in the request is \$5.0 million to continue the humane handling and slaughter work funded in fiscal years 2003 and 2004.

The House passed its version of the FY 2005 Agriculture Appropriations bill, H.R. 4766, on July 13, 2004 with an \$825 million funding level for FSIS. The Senate Appropriations Committee (Stevens-AK) approved its version of the bill, S. 2803, on September 17, 2004 with \$824 million in funding.

The Senate version of the bill includes \$44 million above the Agency's FY 2004 funding level, but nearly \$15 million below the President's request and \$1 million below the House-passed version. The most significant difference between the amount requested by the Administration and the amount provided by the House and Senate are significant reductions in funding for the food and agriculture defense initiative.

During consideration of the measure, the Senate Appropriations Committee rejected an amendment that would have sped up implementation of mandatory country-of-origin labeling, directing it begin on January 1, 2005, instead of the current statutory requirement of September 30, 2006.

Currently, Congress has passed a Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund many government agencies and programs through November 20, 2004, at FY 2004 levels. It is currently unclear whether the FY 2005 Agriculture Appropriations bill will be part of a larger omnibus appropriations package that Congress may consider when it convenes after the election or whether Congress will extend the CR into early Calendar Year 2005.

**Contact:**

Mr. Robert Larew  
Director  
Congressional and Public Affairs Office  
Office of Public Affairs, Education and Outreach  
(202) 720-3897 or e-mail @ robert.larew@fsis.usda.gov