

**National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection
November 16, 2004**

Subcommittee Number 2

Issue: *Technical Service Center*

1. Should the TSC continue to provide technical assistance to establishments?

The subcommittee fully supports the continuation of the Technical Service Center to provide technical assistance to establishments. Establishments generally trust the TSC to be an unbiased source of technical information pertaining to FSIS policy. The TSC has proven itself to be a valuable, responsive asset to the agency and the industry. The subcommittee applauds the agency for its efforts in this regard.

2. If so, are there changes in how the TSC provides this assistance and what would make it more effective?

The effectiveness of the assistance provided by the TSC could be improved by:

- a. Improving consistency of answers by developing and making available more question-and-answer papers in response to frequently asked questions, especially whenever new initiatives are introduced.
- b. Compiling helpful resources for use by establishments, such as research citations, new technology letters, and process parameters for effectiveness.
- c. Capturing customer feedback on service by using both informal and formal surveys. Feedback should be captured on effectiveness, consistency and timeliness of response.
- d. Expanding formal correlation efforts with inspectors, district offices and plant management. On-site correlations should be done routinely not just at request of plant management. A variety of subjects should be covered in the correlations. In addition to on-site correlations, pictures could be developed for use by inspectors, district offices and plant management to clarify written descriptions.
- e. Increasing use of email communication with constituents to help ensure clarity and comprehension of responses.
- f. Provide a directory of staff members and areas of expertise at the TSC and make that publicly available.

3. How can the TSC effectively assist the Agency's other constituent groups, including the States, consumers, and academia?

The subcommittee recommends that the agency more broadly publicize the existence of the TSC. A particularly effective way to do this would be to place a direct link to the TSC on the FSIS homepage. This link should also clarify that the TSC's role is to answer technical questions relating to policies and procedures, not to answer specific questions about food storage, handling, and preparation practices (which are to be handled by the

Meat and Poultry hotline), or to resolve disputes between inspection personnel and plant management (which are to be decided by inspection supervisors).

4. In what new and enhance ways can FSIS use the TSC to ensure that the Agency realizes the full benefits offered by this unit?

The subcommittee recommends that FSIS direct the TSC to:

On a regular basis, develop and disseminate additional Q-and-A documents on technical FSIS issues

Ensure that there is regular communication and correlation between OFO headquarters and the TSC.

Expand the use of correlation sessions (utilizing web casts and/or other available technologies where appropriate), encouraging broad participation.

Whenever possible, conduct technical meetings (utilizing web casts and/or other available technologies where appropriate), again encouraging broad participation.

Summarize TSC user feedback data/responses on a quarterly basis.

Coordinate with the agency to update the list of state HACCP coordinators and regularly disseminate new information to them as it becomes available.

Finally, the subcommittee strongly encourages the Office of Policy to ensure all TSC staff has advance copies of all new policy documents (including notices and directives) before they are publicly available.