

National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection

Issue Paper for consideration by Sub-Committee

Technical Service Center

Purpose:

The Food Safety and Inspection Service's (FSIS) Technical Service Center (TSC) was created in 1997 in conjunction with the implementation of the Pathogen Reduction/Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point final rule. The TSC was charged with, among other duties, the design and development of a strategy to provide technical expertise and guidance to inspection personnel. Reflecting this charge, the TSC adopted as its mission statement: "To provide prompt and consistent service to our customers." Thus, as HACCP was implemented in large, small, and very small plants in 1998, 1999, and 2000, the TSC provided technical advice and guidance, correlated with inspection personnel, led the implementation of new and modified inspection programs and procedures, and developed and delivered training.

As HACCP implementation proceeded, the nature of the TSC's role expanded. As disagreement arose between inspection personnel and establishment employees about the effects of the new rule, the TSC found itself answering questions from industry as well as inspection personnel. To minimize disagreements, the TSC began to encourage establishment and inspection personnel to call the TSC together. The TSC soon began to develop a reputation in industry as well as among Agency employees as an excellent source of useful, reliable, and practical information on Agency policies and compliance with those policies. As a result, providing information to industry has become an important function of the TSC.

Discussion:

Over the years, the role of the TSC has continued to evolve to reflect changes in FSIS. As HACCP implementation has evolved into verification of the design of an establishment's HACCP plan as well as of the performance of its critical control points, the TSC has enhanced its expertise. As the Agency has come to rely more heavily on data as a means to monitor the performance of its personnel as well as a means to spot the development of noncompliances, the TSC has created a Program Analysis staff.

In April of 2004, the TSC was moved from the Office of Field Operations and merged with the Center for Learning (CFL) and the headquarters policy office to form the new Office of Policy, Program, and Employee Development. The TSC's new organization location provides it with significant new opportunities to serve the public as well as the Agency:

- The TSC will still play a major role by correlating with inspection personnel and providing technical information to inspection personnel, industry, and other interested parties. Correlation is a key activity because it ensures consistent

application of the Agency's policies and consistent expectations of the industry. CFL intends to be more active in soliciting correlation opportunities.

- The TSC will develop a closer relationship with CFL. The TSC's close contact with FSIS's field force and its technical expertise puts it in an excellent position to identify training needs and to provide subject matter expertise to support CFL's development of training programs to address those needs.
- The TSC will also be well-situated to identify policy development needs and to contribute to the development of the policy. TSC's close relationship with Office of Field Operations means that it is able to provide a field perspective in policy development. The TSC's data analysis capabilities will also enable it to contribute to the policy development process.

Questions:

Given how the TSC has evolved, FSIS believes that it is time to take stock to ensure that the TSC continues to function in ways that are as effective and useful as possible. Therefore, FSIS asks you to address the following questions:

- 1) Should the TSC continue to provide technical assistance to establishments? If so, are there changes in how the TSC provides this assistance that would make it more effective? How can the TSC effectively assist the Agency's other constituent groups, including the States, consumers, and academia?
- 2) In what new or enhanced ways can FSIS use the TSC to ensure that the Agency realizes the full benefits offered by this unit?

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