

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, DC

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<b>FSIS NOTICE</b>	7-08	1/18/08
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**USING askFSIS**

**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this notice is to instruct inspection program personnel on how to use the new askFSIS application for viewing commonly asked questions and submitting questions. Use of this application will create data that will enable FSIS to develop policy and provide a clear, consistent message regarding inspection related issues. This application provides inspection program personnel with prompt responses to commonly asked questions, developed from analysis of the collected data.

It is FSIS' intent to discontinue service to the mailboxes [FSIS.Labeling@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:FSIS.Labeling@fsis.usda.gov) and [TechCenter@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:TechCenter@fsis.usda.gov) after the initial implementation phase of "askFSIS." FSIS will notify customers before discontinuing service to avoid any disruption in FSIS' customer service.

**II. BACKGROUND**

On August 16, 2007, FSIS launched askFSIS, a new Web-based application, designed to help answer technical and policy-related questions from inspection program personnel, industry, consumer groups, other stakeholders, and the public. The new interactive application provides in-depth answers to technical questions. The askFSIS application contains a knowledge base of questions and answers that is searchable and allows visitors to seek answers related to such diverse topics as exporting, labeling, and inspection-related policies, programs, and procedures. Users can register to be notified when answers are updated.

This application displays a summary list of questions linked to answers and automatically routes new questions that users submit to the appropriate staff. In submitting questions, users select a category and topic before entering a question (see section V.) Based upon the category and topic that the user selects, one of the following staffs--Import-Export Programs Staff (IEPS), the Labeling and Program Delivery Division (LPDD) (formerly the Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff), the

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**DISTRIBUTION:** Electronic

**NOTICE EXPIRES:** 2/1/2009

**OPI:** OPPD

Policy Development Division (PDD) (formerly the Technical Service Center), or the Risk Management Division (RMD) -- provides the response and sends the response to the user.

### **III. APPLICATION LOGIN**

The askFSIS Web page <http://askfsis.custhelp.com> is available through the Start button on FSIS computers (Start/FSIS Applications/Internet-Intranet/askFSIS) or via a link on the FSIS Web page under the “I want to...” box on the right navigation bar. Upon accessing the askFSIS Web page, users should log into the application. New askFSIS users will be asked to create an account with a user id and password. Any user without an account who submits questions using the Labeling or Tech Center e-mail address is automatically provided a user id and password that now must be used to access the application. Users cannot submit questions to askFSIS without an account. New users should select the “Create Account” button and then follow the on-screen prompts. After creating an account, the user can submit questions and obtain answers not found in the knowledge base. When logged in, the application will maintain a history of the user’s viewed questions and answers.

### **IV. SEARCHING THE ONLINE KNOWLEDGE BASE**

Users of askFSIS may search the list of posted questions and answers using the keyword search feature. The user enters key words and clicks on the search button, and the application returns a list of questions and answers published by IEPS, LPDD, and PDD that it found. Although the knowledge base is searchable without logging into the application, if the user logs into the application, other features (such as the ability to submit questions to askFSIS) are available.

### **V. SUBMITTING QUESTIONS**

If the user cannot locate an answer to his or her question after using the search feature, the user may submit a question using the “Submit a Question” tab at the top of the new screen. The user is required to “select a topic” and “select a category” from a drop down list before submitting a question. The category and topic the user selects determines which FSIS staff responds to the question (IEPS, LPDD, or PDD). Before the application allows the user to submit the question, it generates a list of answers based on key words in the question. If this generated list of answers does not respond to the user’s question, the user may submit his or her question by clicking on the “Finish Submitting Question” button. Users may find that it takes a couple of more days to receive an answer to a question than had been the case before askFSIS. Given the broad availability of the question and answer, however, FSIS considers it appropriate to take extra care in responding to the questions.

The application is accessible from any computer with internet access and maintains lists of all user’s questions in the user’s account. Follow-up questions may be updated and resubmitted at any time and are automatically directed to the staff member who provided the original response.

**VI. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

In order to assess the needs of users of this system, the Office of Policy and Program Development will analyze the questions received through askFSIS. The analysis will assess level of use, types of users (e.g., inspection program personnel, states, consumers, industry, etc.) and other issues that reflect the effectiveness and perceived usefulness of the system. Information related to particular Directives and Notices on specific topics will be collected and analyzed for trends and correlations to other FSIS data for statistical significance. Analysis will inform FSIS, if the system is achieving the Agency's goals for it.

Questions regarding this Notice are to be referred to the Policy Development Division at 1-800-233-3935.



Assistant Administrator  
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