

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

FSIS NOTICE

77-09

11/3/09

ENSURING THE INTEGRITY OF FIRM INFORMATION DATA IN THE IN-COMMERCE SYSTEM (ICS)

NOTE: This notice cancels FSIS notice 76-09, reissues its content, and informs users that they should not use quotation marks when searching in the ICS. Quotation marks may be used when searching for firms in the ICS when users believe the firm's name, address, or other searchable field includes quotation marks.

I. PURPOSE

This notice provides Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement and Review (OPEER), Office of Field Operations (OFO), and Office of International Affairs (OIA) personnel instructions for entering new firms into the Assurance Net/In-Commerce System (ICS). It also provides instruction on how to conduct firm searches in the ICS and actions to take when users identify duplicate firm records in the ICS.

II. BACKGROUND

A. The ICS provides OPEER, OFO, OIA, and other program personnel with critical data management, reporting, and management control applications. The ICS supports FSIS surveillance, food defense, product control, investigation, enforcement, and supervision functions that meet the Agency's food safety, food defense, and public health goals. The ICS system includes six component modules for Firm Information, Surveillance, Investigations, Product Control, Enforcement, and Supervision (Out of Plant Performance System). The ICS also contains a link to a User Guide and user instructions in each module, which provide information to assist Agency personnel in entering information into, and using, the ICS.

B. The Firm Information module includes key information for each firm, such as firm name, firm type, physical address, state, county, latitude/longitude, hours of operation, product information, organization structure, and names of firm owners and managing officials. The Firm Information also includes firm history, including hyperlinks to associated surveillance, product control, and investigative records. ICS users have the ability access to enter, view, and edit Firm Information data.

C. Nearly 3,000 of the approximately 148,000 firms in the ICS have been entered manually as new firms since the ICS became operational approximately one year ago. Because surveillance findings, investigations, product detentions, other enforcement

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic

NOTICE EXPIRES: 11/1/2010

OPI: OPPD

actions, and other firm history are directly linked electronically to or otherwise associated with Firm Information, it is critical that firms not be duplicated in the ICS. While most OPEER, OFO, and OIA personnel strive to avoid entering duplicates into the ICS, it is clear that many duplicate firms have been duplicated in the system. By following the instructions in this notice, program personnel can help eliminate this problem and ensure the integrity of ICS data.

III. INSTRUCTIONS FOR ENTERING NEW FIRMS IN THE ICS

A. Whenever users enter data into the ICS, they are to ensure that the firm is in the Firm Information module of the ICS and link, as appropriate, the activity to the firm history.

B. Before creating a new firm record in Firm Information, ICS users are to determine whether the firm is already in ICS. ICS users are to search for the firm in Firm Information and, using, if necessary, a variety of search techniques. (See section IV. of this notice.)

C. When ICS users locate the firm in Firm Information, they are to:

1. Verify that the firm name, address, county, responsible officials, and other information in Firm Information are accurate.

NOTE: The Assignment Code block is auto-filled when the correct county is selected. However, Compliance and Investigation Division, (CID) Investigators are to verify the Assignment Code using the Assignment Code Chart located within the instructions on Firm Information.

2. Make appropriate corrections/changes to Firm Information, if necessary.
3. Document corrections/changes in the Change History tab.

NOTE: ICS users should correlate with other program staffs as necessary to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the Firm Information data.

D. If the firm is not in Firm Information, ICS users are to create a Firm Information record for the firm using the New Firm Information link and enter all applicable information to ensure data accuracy. The New Firm Information link is on the left menu bar under Firm Information.

IV. INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE FIRM SEARCHES IN THE ICS

A. This section provides instructions for conducting effective firm searches. ICS users are to follow these instructions to ensure that a firm is not already in the system before entering it into ICS.

B. The Firm Look Up feature on the View/Edit Firm Information screen allows users to search firms already in the system. ICS users can conduct searches by using one or a combination of several search fields. The Look Up feature is not case sensitive, so it does not matter what combination of upper- or lower-case letters the ICS user uses. For example, the ICS returns approximately 100 firms with “pork” in the firm name whether the user enters “Pork,” “pork,” or “PORK” in the Firm Name field. **NOTE:** Do not use quotation marks when searching for firms in the ICS. For example, type in John’s Pork Market not “John’s Pork Market.”

C. When beginning a search, start with general words and drop-down selections. For example, searches for all firms in Lawrence County Kentucky or Lassen County California-- leaving blank all other fields-- return short lists of firms that are easy to look through to determine whether a particular firm is already in the system. However, a search for all firms in Jefferson County Kentucky returns over 300 firms. To more easily determine whether a particular firm (e.g., Georgetown Manor Nursing) in Jefferson County Kentucky is already in the ICS, narrow the County/State search by entering “Georgetown”—or even “Nursing”—in the Firm Name field. Either search returns much shorter lists that include the firm of interest. ICS users can also use this search strategy effectively with State/City combinations.

D. A Firm Name search may return over a 1,000 firms nationwide, including some that have the name of the firm as part of their Doing Business As name. Narrowing the search by entering “North Carolina” in the State field and then “Raleigh” in the City field or “Wake” in the County field returns much shorter lists that are easy to look-through.

E. The Look Up feature is sensitive to characters, punctuation, and spaces. A search for firms with “Cliff’s” in the name returns 8 firms, while a search for firms with “Cliff” in the name returns the same 8 and an additional 67 completely different businesses.

V. PROCEDURES FOR REMOVING DUPLICATE FIRMS FROM THE SYSTEM

There may be situations when ICS users identify a firm in Firm Information that they believe is a duplicate of another firm in the ICS. When this occurs, OPEER, OIA, and OFO ICS users are to contact the OPEER/CID Regional Office. The CID Regional Office will coordinate changes to the correct record and the removal of duplicate record with OIA, and OFO, and within OPEER, as applicable. The CID Regional Office will follow Section 5.6.4 of the ICS User Guide, which provides instructions on how to

associate surveillance, product control, and investigation records or other content with the Firm Information record in the ICS and how to send a request to the Assurance Net Helpdesk to have the duplicate firm removed from the system. By following this process, ICS users will ensure that the ICS links all relevant records appropriately to the correct Firm Information record.

NOTE: ICS users can find contact information for the five OPEER regional offices, and the states covered by each, on the FSIS Internet Home Page under Contact Us, Key Agency Contacts, OPEER.

VI. DATA CLEANING AND ANALYSIS

To minimize the burden on field personnel and maintain data quality, OPEER will conduct an analysis 30 days following publication of this Notice to evaluate compliance with the instructions herein and to remove duplicate firms from the ICS. Before any duplicate records are removed from the system, the instructions above will be followed to ensure that all relevant information associated with the firm record to be removed is transferred to the correct firm record in the ICS. Once done, the demographic firm information (name, address, etc.) and the Firm Identifier of the duplicate records will be purged from the system. As a result, an ICS user who fails to find a firm with a previously known Firm Identifier is to search for the firm using more general search parameters like those described in section IV. above.

Direct general questions regarding this notice to the Policy Development Division at 1-800-233-3935 or submit your question through *askFSIS* at <http://askfsis.custhelp.com>. Direct specific questions regarding the ICS to the regional OPEER offices (see the note on page 3 for contact information).



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