

**FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE**

**Submitted for the Record**

**Statement of Dr. Barbara J. Masters, Acting Administrator,  
Food Safety and Inspection Service  
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today as we discuss public health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) fiscal year (FY) 2006 budget request for the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

FSIS has a long, proud history of protecting public health. The Agency was established under its current name by the Secretary of Agriculture on June 17, 1981, and its history dates back to 1906. FSIS' mission is to ensure that meat, poultry, and egg products distributed in interstate commerce for use as human food are safe, secure, wholesome, and accurately labeled. FSIS is charged with administering and enforcing the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA), the Egg Products Inspection Act (EPIA), and the regulations that implement these laws.

Ensuring the safety of meat, poultry, and egg products requires a strong infrastructure. To accomplish this task, FSIS has a large workforce of approximately 10,000 employees, most of whom are stationed throughout the country and are present in plants everyday. In FY 2004, over 7,500 inspection personnel stationed in about 6,000 federally inspected meat, poultry, and egg products plants verified that the processing of 43.6 billion pounds of red meat, 52.8 billion

pounds of poultry, and approximately four billion pounds of liquid egg products complied with statutory requirements. In addition, approximately 4.2 billion pounds of meat and poultry and approximately 12.1 million pounds of egg products were presented for import inspection at U.S. ports and borders from 27 of 33 countries that we have determined have inspection systems equivalent to our own. Ensuring that these products are safe, secure, and wholesome is a serious responsibility.

As you are well aware, these are compelling times in food safety, and it is because of your support that we are making real progress in improving the safety of the U.S. food supply. I would like to thank you for providing FSIS the necessary resources to ensure the safety of the food supply. In FY 2005, FSIS received \$7.2 million for important training activities, including entry-level field employee training, Food Safety Regulatory Essentials training (FSRE), and bio-security training. These funds are helping to move the public health agenda forward dramatically. Now, I would like to tell you about our accomplishments during the past year, and about our priorities for better ensuring the safety and security of meat, poultry, and egg products in the future.

#### **Food Safety Accomplishments During 2004**

The American public remains confident in the safety of the U.S. meat, poultry, and egg supply, in part due to the many food safety accomplishments FSIS made in 2004. In August of 2004, a Gallup poll found that more than 85 percent of Americans are confident in the Federal government's ability to protect our food supply.

During the past year, FSIS has continued to make progress in breaking the cycle of foodborne illness through vigilant testing and science-based policies. The 2004 annual Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report on the incidence of infections from foodborne illness showed significant declines from 1996 to 2003 (inclusive) in the incidences of *Yersinia* infections (down 49 percent), *E. coli* O157:H7 (down 42 percent), *Campylobacter* (down 28 percent), and *Salmonella* (down 17 percent).

The decrease in *E. coli* O157:H7 infections occurred primarily during 2002-2003. We anticipate this downward trend to continue when the next annual CDC report is released this spring. The CDC report attributes the changes in the incidence of these infections in part to the control measures implemented by government agencies and the food industry, as well as enhanced food safety education efforts. The CDC report noted that the decrease in human *E. coli* O157:H7 infections in 2003 followed an October 2002 FSIS notice to manufacturers of raw ground beef products that they reassess their HACCP plans regarding this pathogen. Our FSIS experience noted declines in the frequency of *E. coli* O157:H7 contamination of ground beef for 2003 and 2004.

Progress continues in combating *E. coli* O157:H7. After a comprehensive risk assessment on *E. coli* O157:H7 was completed, we required all of the approximately 2,900 beef slaughter and processing establishments to reassess their HACCP plans relative to the potential presence and control of *E. coli* O157:H7 in raw beef. Then, our scientifically trained inspection program personnel conducted the first-ever comprehensive reviews of the reassessed HACCP plans.

The same rigorous scientific and risk-based approach that CDC attributes to the reduction of *E. coli* O157:H7 illness was used in the formulation of the *Listeria monocytogenes* rule that became effective October 6, 2003. Since implementation of the interim final rule, 57 percent of establishments that were not already testing for the pathogen have now begun testing, 27 percent have initiated the use of an antimicrobial agent to inhibit the growth of this organism, and 17 percent started using post-lethality treatments.

Our 2003 interim final rule on control of *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat (RTE) meat and poultry products, based on a thorough risk assessment, outlined three strategies that an establishment could choose from to control the pathogen depending on its product(s) and the environment in which it operates: Alternative 1, provides for a combination of a post-lethality treatment and a growth-suppressing agent or process; Alternative 2, provides for either a post-lethality treatment or a growth-suppressing agent or process; and Alternative 3, relies on sanitation as the primary mitigation. In January 2005, FSIS revised its sampling verification procedures so that more product samples are collected when an establishment relies solely on sanitation practices for *Listeria monocytogenes* control, while fewer samples are analyzed in situations where an establishment has more aggressive process control measures and interventions.

Other indicators of success in combating these pathogens include a decrease in the number of recalls initiated for *E. coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Salmonella*. After we implemented the science based policies I mentioned earlier, we saw a dramatic decline, culminating in a reduction of nearly 18 percent in the number of pathogen-related recalls, from

28 in 2003, to 23 in 2004. While this is certainly good news, we still have areas of concern. One of these is an increasing trend in the percentage of recalls triggered by undeclared allergens. This is a troubling development. We have alerted industry of our concerns and are currently taking case-by-case action and are looking at broader policies to address it industry-wide.

We are also further strengthening the partnerships we have with our sister agency, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and are participating in its enhanced bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) surveillance program. Under the program, FSIS collects samples from all antemortem condemned cattle, except for veal calves not exhibiting central nervous system symptoms, and provides the samples to APHIS for BSE testing. Condemned cattle have never been allowed to enter the food supply. The goal of the APHIS surveillance program is to test as many high risk cattle as possible during a 12 to 18 month period to determine the prevalence of BSE in cattle in our country. In calendar year 2004, 176,468 cattle were tested throughout the United States, compared to 20,543 in 2003.

### **Humane Handling and Slaughter Activities**

FSIS also ensures compliance with the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA) in livestock slaughter establishments that operate under Federal inspection. As part of their routine, ongoing and continuous inspection and enforcement duties, all FSIS inspection personnel are expected to take appropriate action, including suspending operations, if appropriate, of a livestock slaughter establishment if they observe any violations of HMSA. Further, all FSIS inspection personnel are trained and held accountable for enforcing HMSA during the slaughter process.

District Veterinary Medical Specialists (DVMSs) provide technical expertise and oversight for HMSA-related activities, and ensure that humane handling and slaughter activities and enforcement are handled consistently by inspection program personnel. The Agency's DVMSs and Deputy District Managers meet periodically as a group at the Technical Service Center in Omaha, Nebraska, to correlate on humane enforcement issues, and, in fact, one such meeting was just held in March 2005.

The Agency continues to encourage industry to implement good management practices for the humane handling of animals, and requires industry to abide by all of the requirements of USDA's regulations and HMSA. On September 9, 2004, FSIS published a Notice encouraging establishments to use a systematic approach to ensure that they meet the requirements of the law during handling and slaughter. With a systematic approach, establishments focus on treating livestock in such a manner as to minimize excitement, discomfort, and accidental injury the entire time they hold livestock in connection with slaughter. FSIS believes that establishments using a systematic approach to humane handling and slaughter can best ensure that they meet the requirements of the HMSA, FMIA, and implementing regulations.

FSIS also continues to refine humane handling verification and tracking procedures for inspection personnel. On February 18, 2005, the Agency issued FSIS Notice 12-05, to provide inspection personnel with additional information for humane handling and slaughter verification activities related to animal stunning and procedures for checking for conscious animals.

## **FSIS Priorities for 2005 – Holding Ourselves Accountable**

FSIS is holding itself accountable for improving public health. Last year, we outlined a series of priorities to better understand, predict, and prevent contamination of meat and poultry products to improve health outcomes for American families. I am determined to build upon these priorities and continue to improve the Agency's infrastructure with greater attention to risk so that we can then improve our performance under the public health model. The six priorities, all equally important, that I am about to share with you will drive our policies and actions during this calendar year.

### Training, Education & Outreach

The first priority is training, education, and outreach. This has been, and will continue to be, a high priority and we at FSIS would like to thank the Subcommittee for its invaluable support in this area. FSIS can only achieve its public health, food safety, and food security missions with adequate preparation of its workforce through scientific and technical training that reflects the Agency's risk-based approach to food safety and security. Results demonstrate that a highly trained workforce will lead to definitive advancements in public health.

A large segment of our inspection program personnel is receiving intensive training in sanitation procedures and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system principles, based on the type of products produced at the establishments where the inspectors are assigned. We expect to have this segment of our workforce fully trained by the end of the current fiscal year. In 2003, FSIS inaugurated Food Safety Regulatory Essentials (FSRE) training, which was designed to better equip inspection personnel in verifying an establishment's HACCP food safety

system. All participants receive training in the fundamentals of inspection, covering HACCP, the Rules of Practice, Sanitation Performance Standards, and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures. This program also provides food safety training based on the types of products being produced at the establishments where inspectors are assigned. In FY 2004, 1,700 individuals received the Agency's FSRE training, more than doubling the amount of students trained in FY 2003.

FSIS has also initiated a comprehensive training and education effort designed to ensure that every FSIS employee fully understands their role in preventing or responding to an attack on the food supply. To date, more than 5,000 employees have received bio-security training. The Law Enforcement Academic Research Network (LEARN), which is carrying out the training, has stated that the scope of this effort is unparalleled in the Federal sector since training is being provided to such a broad base of our employees.

Furthermore, FSIS has successfully launched training for newly hired Public Health Veterinarians (PHVs) and for newly hired food inspectors. We are also going back to train "new hires" to ensure that any employees who did not initially receive this training are now fully equipped with the latest scientific knowledge. In addition, we now require entering Consumer Safety Inspectors to undergo and pass FSRE training. We are also in the process of implementing policies to require passage of mandatory training courses for entering Enforcement Investigations and Analysis Officers (EIAOs) and for PHVs. Specifically, in 2005 we plan to provide training for 1,200 food inspectors, 400 PHVs, 200 EIAOs, 75 import inspectors, and 40 front line supervisors. We also plan to provide FSRE training for 1,400 Agency personnel. I

also would like to note that we offer seats in our workforce training courses to State inspection personnel.

Additionally, FSIS has enhanced training by taking training opportunities into the field. In August 2003, FSIS announced new regional training centers in Atlanta, GA; Dallas, TX; Philadelphia, PA; Des Moines, IA; and Boulder, CO, designed to provide comprehensive workforce training programs to FSIS field employees. Since October 2004, more than 2,000 employees have been trained regionally. We currently have five regional trainers and plan to hire and train an additional ten by the end of the fiscal year, if not sooner.

We have also posted the training modules for the Food Inspector, Public Health Veterinarian, and the FSRE training on the FSIS Web site. This is significant because it makes the materials we are using to train our workforce more accessible to everyone, including our food safety partners and industry. When Agency policies change, these training materials, including the information posted on the Web site, are updated to reflect the latest scientific information.

FSIS has also extended its outreach to owners and operators of establishments nationwide through teaching workshops that provide detailed information about new directives. In 2004, five BSE and 11 *E. coli* O157:H7 workshops were held across the country to target all audiences concerned with food safety. We took the training materials used at these meetings and distributed them to approximately 2,000 plants (both Federal and State) that slaughter cattle and process beef products. In addition, several workshops were Web cast allowing participants from across the country to interact with the instructors and experts free of charge. Including Web cast

participants, nearly a thousand people took part in the BSE and *E. coli* workshops. We are very proud of these FSIS outreach efforts and the resulting food safety accomplishments.

Because everyone has a responsibility for food safety, educating the public about its role is a crucial element in FSIS' food safety mission. All food preparers, from consumers to food service employees, must know and understand basic safe food-handling practices. These efforts must be broad enough to ensure that no segment of the public is uninformed about safe food handling practices, yet at the same time, target various segments of the population to positively influence those behaviors that pose the greatest potential risk. Communicating with the public about food safety must be accomplished in a manner that is easily understandable so that it is useful to every segment of the population. Thus, FSIS has developed innovative and collaborative methods for delivering the food safety message.

One such innovative way of spreading the food safety message is USDA's Food Safety Mobile, which was introduced in March 2003. This eye-catching "food safety educator-on-wheels" brings food safety information to consumers and builds on our partnerships in communities across the country. Through the Food Safety Mobile, FSIS is sharing its food safety message with the public, especially culturally diverse and underserved populations and those with the highest risk from foodborne illnesses. Since its launch in March 2003, through September 2004, the Food Safety Mobile traveled more than 40,000 miles and appeared in 178 events in approximately 129 cities in 47 States and Washington, D.C.

FSIS consumer education programs are modeled on the concept of integrated marketing. Utilizing that concept, the Agency is developing a mass media campaign plan aimed at improving the safe food handling habits of consumers at home. The campaign plan will include elements such as TV and radio ads, and a comprehensive multi-year plan for implementation and evaluation of the campaign. As part of this program, USDA and the State of Michigan launched a pilot mass media campaign focused on food thermometer use called *“Is It DONE Yet? You Can't Tell by Looking. Use a Food Thermometer to Be Sure.”* The FSIS and Michigan State University project was designed to prevent foodborne illness by promoting thermometer usage among consumers when preparing meat and poultry. Results show a significant increase in the number of consumers who reported using a food thermometer.

USDA’s Meat and Poultry Hotline is an additional tool that FSIS uses to share its food safety message. The Hotline handled over 104,000 calls and 111 media inquiries during FY 2004. The Hotline provides recorded information and live assistance on food safety issues for both English and Spanish-speaking callers.

In April 2004, as a significant expansion of our food safety education outreach efforts, FSIS launched its newly designed, consumer-focused Web site that provides users with the latest information about food safety. “Ask Karen”, the virtual food safety representative of the Agency, contains answers to over 1,300 food safety questions. More than 39,000 questions have been asked and answered since mid-2004. Also new to the redesigned Web site is a constituent subscription service that provides subscribers with up to the minute food safety

information. As of March 2005, more than 9,700 subscribers signed up for over 90,000 subscriptions. FSIS averages more than 280 new subscribers per week.

### Food Security

FSIS has accomplished much in the area of food security, making a strong system even stronger. USDA has had an effective and robust infrastructure in place for many decades that has protected the public against intentional and unintentional threats to the food supply. This science-based food safety and security verification system, with HACCP as the foundation, is designed to prevent and control contamination of the food supply during processing, regardless of whether the contamination is naturally occurring or introduced intentionally.

Recently, we issued and updated a series of directives to employees that outlined specific instructions on the procedures, monitoring, and sampling to be taken in the event the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) declares a Yellow, Orange, or Red Alert. We particularly wanted to ensure that all FSIS divisions had specific instructions in place so that the U.S. meat, poultry, and egg products supply could remain the safest in the world should a threat to the nation occur. In addition, we issued a directive which defined what steps the Agency would take if an emergency incident occurs. These instructions specifically outline steps and procedures for FSIS personnel to take so that the agency's daily operations are not interrupted by an incident. Depending on the threat level, inspection personnel will conduct food security verification procedures on a daily basis at minimum.

Within FSIS, we have established a full-time staff whose sole responsibility is food security – the Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness (OFSEP). That office is in the process of updating seven vulnerability assessments for selected domestic and imported food products. We have found that these risk-based assessments are very powerful risk management tools that can be used to develop strategies and policies that reduce or eliminate the potential risk at vulnerable points along the farm-to-table continuum. The vulnerability assessments we conducted provided us with vital data on some inherent risks in our food safety system that otherwise would not have been as apparent.

These assessments allowed us to rank food products and potential contaminating agents in order of highest concern. Using this risk-based ranking, during periods of heightened awareness our laboratories examine samples for threat agents posing the greatest risk as identified in our vulnerability assessments. For instance, if DHS declares a specific threat to the food supply or a particular product or process, then our lab personnel will activate the emergency response plan and test up to 100 percent of all food safety samples for possible food security risks.

Protection of the United States' food supply is critical for maintaining the safety and health of the nation's citizens and the security of our economy. The Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) has been created to provide an integrated means of protecting the food supply at the local, state, and nation levels. FERN is a coordinated initiative between the US Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the Department of Health and Human Services' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to develop an integrated laboratory network capable of providing ongoing surveillance and monitoring of the food supply, as well as

conducting the extensive testing necessary in the event of a terrorist attack on the food supply. Specifically, laboratories participating in FERN are responsible for detecting and identifying biological, chemical, and radiological agents in food. The involvement, participation, and expertise of local, state, and federal laboratories in FERN assures that all food commodities under all jurisdictions are covered by the network. The size of the network and its wide geographic representation are also important because they will enable FSIS to rely on state and local laboratories to participate in handling the numerous samples that will be required to be tested in the event that a terrorist attack on the food supply involves meat, poultry, or eggs.

FSIS Program Investigators are vigilant in ensuring food security, through annual reviews, audits, and investigations and by conducting other activities, including assessing product handling facilities, providing guidance to meat, poultry, and egg products industry officials regarding food security principals, and distributing Agency food security publications.

We have also utilized a risk-based approach in education materials prepared for our stakeholders. For instance, we have developed three sets of guidelines for different segments of the farm-to-table continuum: *Food Security Guidelines for Food Processors*; *Safety and Security Guidelines for the Transportation and Distribution of Meat, Poultry and Egg Products*; and *Food Safety and Food Security: What Consumers Need to Know*. All of these publications are available on FSIS' Web site at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov).

We are looking at ways to further improve our Automated Import Information System (AIIS), which uses statistics to choose imports for reinspection and allows our inspectors at all ports-of-

entry to share data. From the vulnerability assessment, we have enhanced this network to account for certain food security issues, and we are working with other agencies, such as the Customs and Border Patrol, to integrate our database systems to enhance the flow of vital information to further strengthen our food safety system against intentional attacks.

FSIS and USDA work closely with the White House and DHS to coordinate our food security efforts. Moreover, FSIS is an integral part of the White House Interagency Food Working Group, which is charged with developing an interagency strategy to protect the food supply and minimize it as a target for terrorist activity.

In addition, we are working with HHS-FDA, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, and Agricultural Marketing Service to develop training in food security awareness. We also recently entered into a cooperative agreement with HHS-FDA, DHS, and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture to develop the best practices by which Federal assistance can be provided to States and localities expeditiously and effectively.

We are also interacting more closely with the intelligence and law enforcement communities. We are building stronger relationships with intelligence and enforcement agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Transportation Security Agency, and the Coast Guard.

With respect to our trading partners, FSIS is seeking to enter into bilateral agreements with several countries to share information that would help secure the food supply. Agreements are

being developed with Canada, and similar discussions are beginning with Australia, Japan, Mexico, and New Zealand.

Finally, it is vital that all food slaughter and processing establishments, as well as all import and export establishments, assess potential risks in their operations and take steps to ensure the security of their operations. With that in mind, FSIS has developed the “Industry Self-Assessment Checklist for Food Security” and is developing outreach efforts to distribute this document to regulated industry. This voluntary checklist provides establishments with a constructive tool to evaluate their security plans to prevent intentional contamination of their products, thus helping to further ensure food safety and security and protect public health.

### Risk Analysis

FSIS is committed to emphasizing science in the development of food safety policies. A scientific approach to food safety that incorporates risk analysis is critical to FSIS’ ability to combat the ever changing threats to public health. Thus, another priority is risk analysis, which includes risk assessment, risk management, and risk communication. In addition to providing regulatory agencies with a solid foundation for policy changes, science-based risk analysis is necessary to help the Agency better predict and respond to food safety threats by allowing us to focus Agency resources on hazards that pose the greatest threat to public health. Analysis of FSIS regulatory sampling data, as well as other sources of data, including baseline studies, helps us detect trends and identify connections between persistence, prevalence and other factors such as practices employed by plants, seasonal variations, and establishment size. With that in mind,

the Agency will begin collecting samples in late Spring 2005, for a baseline study for beef trimmings in raw ground beef production. Planning for additional studies is underway.

In recent years, the Agency has conducted a number of risk assessments, most notably those with regard to *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Listeria monocytogenes*. As I stated earlier in my testimony, we have seen marked reductions in both pathogens, thanks, in large part, to the risk assessments that provided the scientific framework for our *E. coli* and *Listeria monocytogenes* policies. In the coming year, FSIS plans to conduct a similar risk assessment for *Salmonella* in raw ground beef and raw poultry products. Just last month, the Agency held a public meeting about two draft risk assessments – one for *Salmonella* in ready-to-eat (RTE) and poultry products and one for *Clostridium perfringens* in both RTE and heat-treated products that are not RTE.

To fully realize the benefits of risk analysis, however, FSIS must develop methods for anticipating or predicting risk through enhanced data integration. FSIS is engaged in developing innovative ways to anticipate hazards, so that it can act to ensure that those hazards do not manifest themselves as public health problems. The Agency is currently examining its regulatory data to identify conditions that consistently have foreshadowed the development of significant problems. By identifying such conditions, inspection personnel can utilize data to alert establishments so they can take corrective actions that may prevent a hazard.

#### Management Controls and Efficiency

FSIS is looking for ways to best achieve our operational goals and objectives. In order to better focus its resources, FSIS is establishing a more fully documented management control program.

Management controls are operational checks and balances that safeguard policies, procedures and structures to ensure that tasks are completed in the most efficient and effective manner. With more fully documented proper management controls, authority, responsibility, and accountability are more clearly defined and delegated. In addition, program performance is routinely analyzed, policies, and procedures are regularly updated, management decisions are transparent and traceable, documentation is accurately maintained, and supervision is appropriate and continuous.

### Communications

The Agency has also embarked on a comprehensive effort to ensure that all levels of communications are as efficient, effective, and rapid as possible. We recognize that as a public health regulatory agency, we are only as effective as our communication systems. Nowhere was this more evident than in the post-September 11th environment we find ourselves in as a country and as an Agency.

It is vitally important that the Agency continue to receive the necessary funds to maintain and upgrade its information technology (IT) systems, which will improve efficiency and enhance communication between and among all FSIS employees. For FSIS, the use of databases to track inspection program personnel tasks is essential for food safety verification. It is a vital communication resource whereby inspectors can enter information about their daily food safety, security, and humane handling verification duties. With the vast and dispersed number of meat, poultry, and egg processing facilities scattered across the country and throughout the world, our geographically dispersed workforce needs the ability to send, receive, analyze, and react to

information gathered at any one of these potential hot-points, because it is critical to the protection of public health. As an Agency we are striving to ensure that our IT systems operate in a “realtime data exchange” environment. In addition, managers at the district level and at headquarters can make crucial management decisions based on tracking progress and analyzing the performance of their employees, as well as the establishments for which they are responsible. A more rapid exchange of information with the field enables FSIS supervisors and managers to make better informed decisions on food safety and security issues, thus better protecting public health.

I have made it a very high priority to ensure that our numerous data gathering and storage systems operate in a seamless and cooperative fashion across the Agency and with our partners. We appreciate the support this committee has provided in the past to allow us to improve and update our communications systems.

To be a successful public health Agency, our employees need the right information to do their jobs. Information needs to be communicated quickly and accurately; ensuring public health will be protected through safe and secure meat, poultry, and egg products. That is why the Agency has put together an Internal Communications Board and charged them with developing ways to enhance the flow of communication laterally and vertically within FSIS. This board is engaged in many projects to best meet the communication needs of our employees. One major activity is the new FSIS Intranet. The Intranet will be one-stop-shopping for all internal FSIS needs, providing access to notices, directives, regulations, policies, career tools, and up-to-date news and information about the Agency. The board has also been challenged with working on our

Agency's image and message. It is crucial that all employees and stakeholders recognize and understand the critical public health mission of FSIS.

We continue to strive to improve our communications both internally with our workforce and externally with stakeholders and our public health partners. As one partner in the U.S. food safety effort, FSIS strives to maintain a strong working relationship with its sister public health agencies. Cooperation, communication, and coordination are absolutely essential if we are to be effective in addressing public health issues. We made great strides in this area when we dealt with the BSE-positive cow discovered in December 2003, and as we implemented the new interim regulations this year. Moreover, we have been involved in discussions on establishing data sharing systems with other agencies, such as APHIS and CDC. Maintaining information technology support will allow for a collaborative effort between State and Federal agencies by fully integrating currently duplicative processes and data collection, such as surveillance and monitoring activities for human and animal diseases.

#### The Continued Evolution of Inspection and Enforcement

Another Agency priority is to continue the evolution of inspection and enforcement. A risk based approach, encompassing all we do and combined with the Agency's scientific commitment, will facilitate FSIS' ability to combat ever changing threats to public health.

Today, we have a much better reaction to the hazard landscape. Our ability to target resources for food safety and security verification systems has greatly improved. FSIS has refined its risk-based approach from a fairly static environment to one that is more fluid and can better react to

food safety challenges that exist, and those that may arise, in order to further improve public health.

Specifically, our Agency works interdependently to assess data from FoodNet, other Federal agencies, and State public health agencies, as well as the FSIS Consumer Complaint Monitoring System (CCMS), to investigate hazards by identifying sources, conducting food safety assessments in regulated facilities, and conducting investigations in associated transportation, distribution, and storage facilities. In addition, food security monitoring procedures have been incorporated into inspection verification methodology at all domestic and import establishments. In-plant regulatory control actions as well as effective administrative and criminal proceedings have been and continue to be effective deterrents to violations of law.

As we approach the completion of the first decade under HACCP, FSIS is determined to take a risk-based approach to food safety and security verification in order to realize the next dynamic in food safety. With recent developments in science and risk analysis, it is clear that there are enhancements that can be made to HACCP that offer a more complete approach to inspection and ensuring public health. This enhanced risk-based system builds on the strong foundation provided by the HACCP/Pathogen Reduction regulations and allows the FSIS workforce to more effectively utilize their expertise in assuring the safety and security of America's meat, poultry, and egg products.

To meet its goal of protecting public health, FSIS will continue to review policies and regulations and work with interested parties to modernize and further enhance its inspection and

food safety and security verification efforts, including the verification of humane slaughter and handling. It is clear that progress has been made, but through the continued evolution of inspection and enforcement, in our risk based system, FSIS intends to make the world's safest food supply even safer.

### **FY 2006 Budget Request**

I appreciate having the opportunity to discuss a number of FSIS' accomplishments with you.

Now, I would like to present an overview of the FY 2006 budget request for FSIS.

Implementation of these budget initiatives is imperative to helping us attain FSIS' public health mission. In FY 2006, FSIS is requesting an appropriation of \$849.7 million, a net increase of about \$32.5 million from the enacted level for FY 2005, which includes \$139 million to be derived from proposed new user fees from the industry.

### Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative

The FY 2006 budget also requests an increase of \$19.5 million for FSIS to support a food and agriculture defense initiative in partnership with other USDA agencies, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Homeland Security. Food contamination and animal and plant diseases can have catastrophic effects on human health and the economy. 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. Our food and agriculture defense initiative has five components:

- The Food Emergency Response Network (FERN);
- Data systems to support FERN;
- Enhancing FSIS laboratory capabilities;
- Biosurveillance; and
- Follow-up bio-security training.

For FERN we are seeking an increase of \$13 million; for FERN data systems we are asking for an increase of \$2.5 million; for enhancing laboratory capabilities we are requesting \$2.5 million; for biosurveillance we are requesting an increase of \$417,000; and for bio-security training we are seeking an increase of \$1 million.

The first component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is FERN, a coordinated initiative between FSIS and the Department of Health and Human Services' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to develop an integrated network of federal, state, and local laboratories. FERN is an integrated laboratory network capable of providing ongoing surveillance and monitoring of the food supply, as well as conducting the extensive testing necessary in the event of a terrorist attack on the food supply. The FSIS FY 2006 budget request for FERN seeks an increase of \$13 million from FY 2005 which will enable the Agency to manage, maintain, and expand on the existing group of FERN labs. These funds will improve the Agency's ability to handle the greatly increased number of samples that would be required to be tested in the event of a terrorist attack on the meat, poultry or egg products supply. These State and local laboratories in the FERN network would play an essential role in conducting this expanded testing.

The second and third components of the food and agriculture defense initiative provide further support to FERN. The electronic laboratory exchange network (eLEXNET) is a national, web-based, electronic data reporting system that allows analytical laboratories to rapidly report and exchange standardized data. The FY 2006 budget request would provide funding needed to make eLEXNET available to additional FERN and other food-testing laboratories nationwide. In turn, the budget request would enhance FSIS' laboratory capabilities in order to detect new bioterror-associated agents, and to ensure FSIS' capability and capacity to perform the toxin and chemical testing that will be standardized across all FERN laboratories.

Fourth, the food and agriculture defense initiative will allow FSIS to participate in an interagency biosurveillance initiative that would improve the Federal government's ability to rapidly identify and characterize a potential bioterrorist attack. Funding this initiative will improve Federal surveillance capabilities and enable FSIS to integrate with DHS to compile FSIS surveillance information rapidly with threat information. This funding would also allow FSIS to focus its resources on the vulnerable products and processes identified during the Agency's vulnerability assessments of imported and domestic products and establish a Foodborne Disease Surveillance Communication system to coordinate with DHS systems.

Because the realm of biosecurity is ever changing, FSIS must provide its workforce with the most up-to-date information possible to ensure that meat, poultry, and egg products are protected from intentional contamination. Therefore, the final component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is follow-up biosecurity training of the workforce. This additional training is

essential as part of the ongoing effort to protect the public by educating the workforce regarding the latest Agency policies, threat agents, and countermeasures to those agents.

### Public Health Training

The maturation of HACCP has widened the scope of all front-line inspection duties. While slaughter line inspectors have largely retained their traditional tasks, other front-line personnel have acquired more complex responsibilities related to public health, including food safety assessments, food security, and documentation and analysis to support detentions, recalls, or other enforcement actions.

Further integrating front-line inspection and science will allow scientifically-trained FSIS personnel to most effectively utilize their expertise. For instance, FSIS intends to fully employ the scientific skills of its Public Health Veterinarians – systems analysis, epidemiology, biostatistics, microbiology, pathology, and toxicology – to safeguard public health. Accordingly, FSIS has been revising veterinary work assignments so that PHVs spend 25 percent of their time on public health assessment and assurance. As part of the FY 2006 budget request, FSIS is requesting an increase of \$2.2 million for relief positions so that the Agency can take full advantage of the training, experience, and responsibilities of these highly-trained PHVs. The Agency and the public will benefit from more effective utilization of the technical knowledge and skills of our veterinarians through their expanded public health activities.

### Supporting FSIS' Basic Mission

The FSIS budget request for FY 2006 supports the Agency's basic mission of ensuring that the nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.

In order to fulfill the Agency's statutory obligations to provide continuous inspection of meat, poultry, and egg products, the budget requests an increase of \$13.9 million for the FSIS inspection program to provide for the 2.3 percent pay raise for FSIS employees in FY 2006 and to assure that the Agency is provided sufficient funds to maintain programs without disruption to industry operations.

### User Fee Proposal

In FY 2006, FSIS estimates it will collect \$122.9 million in existing annual user fees to recover the costs of overtime, holiday, and voluntary inspection. Of the \$849.7 million requested in the FY2006 budget, \$139 million is proposed to be derived from a new user fee that would recover the costs of providing inspection services beyond an approved eight-hour primary shift. A legislative proposal authorizing this new fee will soon be submitted to Congress. This will result in significant savings for the American taxpayer.

### **Closing**

We will continue to engage the scientific community, public health experts, and all interested parties in an effort to identify science-based solutions to public health issues to ensure positive public health outcomes. It is our intention to pursue such a course of action this year in as

transparent and inclusive a manner as is possible. The strategies I discussed today will help FSIS continue to pursue its goals and achieve its mission of reducing foodborne illness, and protecting public health through food safety and security.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to speak with the Subcommittee and submit testimony regarding the steps that FSIS is taking to remain a world leader in public health. I look forward to working with you to improve our food safety system, ensuring that we continue to have the safest food supply in the world.