

FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE

Submitted for the Record

Statement of

Dr. Richard Raymond, Under Secretary for Food Safety

Before the

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,

Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the status of the Food Safety and Inspection Service's (FSIS) programs and the fiscal year (FY) 2008 budget request for food safety within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). I am Dr. Richard Raymond, Under Secretary for Food Safety. With me today is Dr. David Goldman, Acting Administrator of FSIS.

While I have already done so in meeting with you personally, I would like to first take this opportunity to publicly congratulate you, Chairwoman DeLauro, on your new position chairing the Subcommittee. I look forward to working with you on our common commitment to public health and food safety. I would like to thank you and the other members of the Subcommittee for your ongoing efforts to provide FSIS with the

resources to protect meat, poultry, and egg products. These funds are helping to move our public health agenda forward.

This agency has a long history of protecting public health. A history we proudly celebrated last year during the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Federal Meat Inspection Act, which ushered in a new era of food safety on a national level. The achievements we celebrated were made possible thanks to the help and cooperation of you and our other food safety partners. I know that together we can continue to strengthen our food safety system and improve public health.

One of the greatest successes has been FSIS' evolution from a command-and-control regulatory agency using simple inspection techniques based on touch, sight and smell into a public health regulatory agency that prides itself on preventing illnesses through scientific assessment, risk-based policy development, intensive public health outreach and education campaigns, and assurance that members of society receive adequate safe and secure food through the exercise of authority. I am proud to be a small part of USDA's public health legacy along with all of our dedicated and talented employees.

Since I last visited with the Subcommittee, we have undertaken important initiatives in cooperation with our food safety stakeholders to reduce the prevalence of *Salmonella* in meat and poultry products which has resulted in consistent declines in product positive rates. For example, in broilers we have seen the numbers go from 16.3 percent of samples testing positive for the pathogen in calendar year (CY) 2005 down to 11.4

percent for CY 2006, a period when testing was targeted to the establishments with the worst track record for controlling *Salmonella*. I'm proud to report that the 11.4 percent positives for *Salmonella* in broilers for CY 2006 is the lowest level since CY 2000.

These numbers are a direct result of FSIS' science-based policies implemented in the past two years, our efforts and our partners' efforts, to produce a safer product. It is my hope that over time we will see dramatic declines in the rates of *Salmonella* infection from meat and poultry products like those we have seen in *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Listeria monocytogenes* in the past seven years in concert with declining positive regulatory product testing results, as highlighted in the attached chart.

We have also begun laying the ground work for a more robust risk-based inspection system and we have improved outreach to the small and very small meat and poultry plants that make up nearly 90 percent of the establishments inspected each day by FSIS.

USDA's Office of Food Safety takes a farm-to-table approach to ensure a safe supply of meat, poultry and egg products. That means we look at every process along the farm-to-table continuum to see where improvements and enhancements can be suggested or where appropriate, regulated, so that we have the safest and most secure food supply possible. Success with this approach is dependent on strong collaboration between all of our food safety partners and stakeholders. I know that we can do more by working cooperatively and collaboratively than we could ever think of doing alone.

## Food Safety Successes

Thanks to this focus on cooperation and collaboration on issues that directly relate to public health and food safety from all of our food safety partners, we've seen dramatic improvements in the safety of meat, poultry and egg products. The best indicators of this progress are those that directly relate to pathogen reduction and public health outcomes.

Since 2000, the percentage of regulatory samples of meat and poultry products that tested positive for *Listeria monocytogenes* has fallen by 58 percent so that in 2006, less than 0.5 percent of product samples were positive for this dangerous pathogen. This is even more remarkable than meets the eye, as FSIS has recently focused its efforts on the products that present the greatest public health risk.

The results are even more dramatic for sampling for *E. coli* O157:H7 in ground beef. Since CY 2000, positive samples have declined by 80 percent. Only 0.17 percent of FSIS' samples were positive in CY 2006, down from 0.86 percent in CY 2000.

We're also seeing dramatic declines in the rate of human illness from pathogens commonly transmitted through food. Using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) most recent statistics and comparing human illness data from 2005 with 1998 data, *E. coli* O157:H7 illness rates are down 29 percent, and illnesses from *Listeria monocytogenes* are down 32 percent. Cases of *Campylobacter* have decreased by 30 percent.

However, we can't be satisfied with these numbers. Decreases in positives in our product samples and human illnesses don't mean much if you're the one who gets sick – for you, it's still 100 percent. We must continue to improve our public health protections and prepare for future threats using sound science, before those threats can harm consumers.

### Working Together with Our Food Safety Partners

USDA works in close collaboration with our sister agencies on multi-jurisdictional food safety issues, whether those agencies are Federal, State, or local entities. One such collaborative system is FoodNet (the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network) a part of CDC's Emerging Infections Program. FSIS worked in conjunction with CDC, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and epidemiologists and public health laboratories in several States to establish FoodNet in 1996. FoodNet conducts active surveillance of foodborne diseases, case-control studies to identify risk factors for acquiring foodborne illness, and surveys to assess medical and laboratory practices related to foodborne illness diagnosis. It also provides estimates of foodborne illness and sources of specific diseases that are usually found in the United States and interprets these trends over time. Data are then used to help analyze the effectiveness of the Pathogen Reduction/Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (PR/HACCP) rule and other regulatory actions, as well as to develop public education initiatives.

A sister system is PulseNet, a collaborative national computer network of public health laboratories that helps to rapidly identify outbreaks of foodborne illness that was also established in 1996. Laboratories now perform DNA "fingerprinting" on bacteria taken

from positive product samples and human illnesses. The network permits rapid comparison of the “fingerprint” patterns through a CDC database. PulseNet is an early warning system that links seemingly sporadic illnesses together and enables public health officials to more quickly identify and respond to multi-State illness outbreaks. In fact, through the use of PulseNet, we are able to identify seemingly disparate foodborne illnesses as actual outbreaks more quickly. Prior to PulseNet, many of these outbreaks would not have been recognized as outbreaks. These two systems allow agencies to collaborate and bring their specialized knowledge together to better protect public health.

A good example of this collaboration is our work on the recent multi-State *E. coli* O157:H7 investigation associated with fast food restaurants. From the very beginning of the investigation FSIS was a valuable presence in daily task force calls with Federal partners and State agencies.

At the beginning of the multi-agency investigation, a case-control study coordinated by the CDC determined that ground beef was one possible source of contamination. And, even though further refinement of the analysis indicated no ground beef association and was leaning towards product regulated by the FDA, FSIS remained engaged. Agency investigators determined the supply and distribution chain for the affected locations and reviewed the testing conducted by State public health laboratories involved in the case. FSIS also completed a thorough HACCP records review and process control verification at the establishment which supplied the particular ground beef. The agency even investigated the possibility of cross contamination. Throughout this endeavor, the agency

remained vigilant in assisting our Federal, State and local partners in assuring public health priorities were met. The combined efforts and expertise of the different Federal and State agencies allowed quicker resolution to this outbreak than any one of the agencies could have accomplished working by itself.

FSIS similarly collaborated with our Federal and State public health partners during the September 2006 multi-State spinach outbreak. While spinach is regulated by the FDA, the initial outbreak was reported through a possible link to food consumed at a restaurant in Wisconsin. It is because of an initial unknown food source that FSIS was contacted by the Wisconsin Department of Health. Through the use of PulseNet, the CDC was able to quickly identify matching isolates, and determine in less than five days – by reviewing State investigations in Oregon, Washington and New Mexico – that spinach was the vehicle for the outbreak. Although the active FSIS investigation ended on September 21, the agency continued to closely cooperate with the FDA, CDC and State agencies in their investigation, and stood ready to respond if needed.

### Amenability

Since we are talking about cooperation and collaboration between FSIS and its food safety partners, I would like to update you on a topic you have asked about in the past, the amenability to inspection of certain products that contain meat or poultry. While this issue affects only a miniscule percent of the products FSIS and FDA regulates, we understand it can be a confusing point and we are working to clarify it. On December 15, 2005, FSIS and FDA held a public meeting to receive comments from the industry and

consumers on the best way to proceed and to create a clear, transparent, and consistent application of jurisdictional determinations. Based, in part, on this input, FSIS, with FDA, is developing a proposed rule to move this process forward.

## Avian Influenza

The importance of cooperation and collaboration can also be seen as USDA continues to prepare for a possible outbreak of avian influenza. The Administration's goal is to ensure that all appropriate preparations are being made for the potential spread of the H5N1 strain of the virus to the United States, whether in birds or in humans.

USDA is playing many important roles in this effort. The Department's four-part approach to combating avian influenza includes limiting the spread of the virus overseas through international outreach. Second is educating the American public through a proactive campaign to inform without causing alarm. Third is USDA's and the Department of Interior's aggressive surveillance program in partnership with States, which includes wild birds, live bird markets, backyard flocks and thanks to the cooperation of industry – testing of commercial flocks. The fourth aspect is to practice executing our response plan. As you know, USDA has a long and successful history of dealing with highly pathogenic avian influenza.

As we all know, detection in birds does not signal the start of a human pandemic. This virus is not easily transmitted from person to person. Most human illnesses that we've seen overseas have resulted from direct contact with sick or dead birds. No human

illnesses have been attributed to properly handled and cooked poultry. This is another area where FSIS and USDA have been actively engaged with our partners in government, industry and consumers, to make sure concerns related to any possible pandemic are addressed before that ever happens.

Even if the virus reaches North America, there's no reason for consumers to be concerned about eating poultry. Cooking poultry to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit kills all viruses and foodborne pathogens, including the avian influenza virus. We're dedicated to getting that message out. Besides having the current Federal and State inspection systems in place, USDA has worked with the poultry industry to develop a further layer of food safety protection. Industry has agreed that if highly pathogenic avian influenza is suspected in a commercial flock, USDA will test poultry meat originating from a 10-kilometer radius during the previous 24 hours to rule out the presence of the avian influenza virus. Testing will be conducted utilizing new methodology and procedures developed by USDA, allowing results to be obtained in less than five hours. Product will be voluntarily held until its safety is confirmed.

This is just one good example of many of how the government can work with industry to ensure the safety of the U.S. food supply. This voluntary approach, developed in close cooperation with people from across the country and from different backgrounds and responsibilities, not only protects public health, but also helps to secure this vital sector of American agriculture. It accomplishes this by providing the public with the information they need to maintain confidence in the safety of these products.

We are prepared to put policy into practice. We held an unprecedented avian influenza summit last summer to address the safety of the food supply and the policies that would be implemented if high path avian influenza was detected in North America. Together with representatives of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, FDA, CDC, State and local health and agriculture officials, industry, consumers, retail and restaurant groups, we discussed how we could best combine our specific areas of experience to best serve the American public in the event of a domestic highly pathogenic avian influenza detection in poultry.

### Small and Very Small Plant Outreach

Last year I told you about our plan to reach out to small and very small plants. I wanted to improve communication between FSIS and small plants and make sure that we could identify and respond to their needs faster and more efficiently. We started the process of improving communication and outreach by doing something that is often overlooked – and that’s listening. We held sessions for the owners and operators of small and very small plants in Montana, California, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. We learned a lot from those sessions. They gave us a better understanding of what was causing gaps between a plant’s performance and our expectations for how they should operate under HACCP.

In the late 1990s, as HACCP was first being implemented in plants, I think that perhaps the agency didn't fully understand the unique needs that small and very small plants have when it comes to full-scale HACCP implementation and compliance.

After all, the large plants don't write their HACCP plans at kitchen tables, as some of the owners of small plants I have visited with do, and they don't have to shut down when they send their HACCP coordinator or quality assurance director to an FSIS regulatory meeting. FSIS understands that these are real needs and that we have an important role in helping these plants – over 90 percent of the plants that we regulate – address them. At the same time, we must have safe products, no matter the size of the company or what product it produces. A consumer eating a steak at a restaurant or a hamburger at a barbecue doesn't know if that product came from a large or small plant – nor should it matter.

Thus, any comprehensive effort to improve food safety in the United States must include all federally inspected establishments, including small and very small plants. That's why FSIS unveiled its *Strategic Implementation Plan for Strengthening Small and Very Small Plant Outreach* at College Station, Texas on May 31<sup>st</sup>.

The 10 strategies that were developed for this plan form the foundation of our national effort to ensure that all federally inspected establishments have the training and resources necessary to produce the safest food possible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, no matter the size of the plant or type of product they produce. The strategies include:

- One-stop customer service.
- Worldwide access to consistent answers for commonly asked regulatory and technical questions.
- Better access to technical resources including scientific validation materials.
- Easier access to education and training opportunities.
- A larger role for enforcement investigations and analysis officers (EIAOs) to play in providing critical resources to plants.
- Expanded partnerships with other entities, such as the extension service, State inspection programs and rural development agencies to better meet the unique needs of small and very small plants.
- Effective use of all sources of information to identify outreach and educational needs.
- Continuous reassessment of plants' needs.
- Improved leveraging of our resources.
- And finally, thorough auditing of the effectiveness of our efforts to make sure they're really helping these plants produce the safest possible product.

Two things set this attempt apart from past efforts. First, we're placing the full weight of the agency behind this effort to better assist small and very small plants. Second, as I'll discuss further shortly, we're working with other agencies within USDA to make sure that the needs of these establishments will be better met in the future. It's also a two-way street, and the plants that want to do better will be the ones that get the most out of our improved outreach.

I'm reminded of the saying you see often on police cars: "We are here to protect and serve." Instead for FSIS, it's now: "We are here to regulate AND educate."

We are committed to providing numerous options designed to make it easy to receive the training small and very small plants want. We have conducted regulatory educational sessions, which are open to both industry and inspection personnel. So far these sessions have been made up of 60 percent industry and 40 percent FSIS personnel, and I believe it is a great example of our workforce's dedication to collaboration. In addition, FSIS has provided Web-casts and more night and weekend workshops, as well as making sure that all of our workshops are available on DVD and CD-ROM.

It's also why we're working with Dr. Gale Buchanan, the Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics, on ways to reenergize extension programs and expand the reach of our educational courses. The goal is to give plants the ability to learn the most up-to-date information at the time and place that's best for them.

This is important because education facilitates a greater understanding of, and helps to close, any performance gaps that exist in the implementation of a plant's HACCP plan. This achieves the goal of HACCP compliance without FSIS taking enforcement actions.

I'm much happier with a solution that calls for increased education and outreach before increased regulation. However, we'll do whatever it takes to ensure that a robust HACCP system is implemented and maintained in each and every plant, large or small.

We also recognize that improving the implementation of HACCP plans is not just a matter of education. It's also a rural economic development issue. In cooperation with Thomas Dorr, the Under Secretary for Rural Development, we're working to distribute important information to small and very small plant owners concerning available loans and grants. These loans and grants can provide needed money that can be used to make any necessary improvements called for in HACCP plans. Noncompliance records are often written for shortcomings in a plant's physical environment and that's why we need to help establishments not only move their HACCP plans, but also their physical environments, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This brings me to an item in the plan that I believe represents the greatest departure from our old way of thinking. It involves FSIS' EIAOs and the important role they play in our new education and outreach efforts.

EIAOs are now offering to meet with plant owners before a scheduled food safety assessment. These meetings are meant to help educate owners and operators about what to expect and what information they will need to provide them during the assessment. FSIS personnel have also been instructed to inform owners of the available resources that can be used to enhance a plant's food safety systems.

Our EIAOs understand their important role in outreach and have the necessary skills to carry it out. After all, they're on the ground and in the best position to help strengthen a plant's food safety systems. In July 2006, we started EIAO outreach as a pilot program with a small number of establishments. Between July and October 2006, EIAOs visited 250 plants. However, the program quickly drew considerable interest, so we expanded it to include all establishments. As a result, between November 2006 and the end of February 2007, our EIAOs visited over 350 plants in this new aspect of our outreach efforts.

Don't misunderstand – this is not the culmination of our efforts to improve the effectiveness of our communication and outreach efforts with small and very small plants. Rather, it's just the beginning. I believe this will remain an important priority for the Office of Food Safety in the years to come.

## Reaching At-Risk Audiences

We are also seeking new and improved ways to work with the public health community to decrease foodborne illness. This past fall we held a very successful one-of-a-kind conference in Denver on reaching at-risk audiences. At-risk audiences are defined as pregnant women, older adults, young children and those with weakened immune systems. Over 600 people attended – primarily public health officials, consumers, industry and food safety educators from around the Nation and the world.

The reason why this conference was unique was that it was the first meeting to focus on the serious gaps and hurdles we face in reaching at-risk populations – namely the ones who are in the hands of front line caregivers.

We need to expand the number of health care providers who can serve as food safety ambassadors. Tapping into the medical community is a charge that everyone at the conference was given. As front line responders, health care providers see patients on a daily basis and in many cases witness their pain and suffering. Therefore, getting through to this community will help us immensely to reach an ever growing at-risk population in this country.

Great progress was made in furthering our outreach and heightening attention to those at risk by public health professionals and educators. We were able to get some critical dialogue going, and we anticipate much more dialogue and action in the future. All of

which was made possible thanks to the collaboration with our food safety partners, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Partnership for Food Safety.

## The Be Food Safe Campaign

The Be Food Safe campaign is an updated national mass media and grassroots consumer food safety education campaign that will build on the four key food safety messages of: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill.

It was developed by FSIS, and is being supported and promoted by FDA, CDC and other partners in the Partnership for Food Safety Education.

The Be Food Safe campaign provides new tools for health care professionals, public health officials, educators, industry, and the media to use in educational efforts to positively affect consumer behaviors and reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

The look and feel of the Be Food Safe campaign takes the Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill messages to another level and gives us another means of reaching out to consumers. The campaign materials highlight behaviors – the specific actions people must take to be food safe when preparing food.

As part of the campaign, we'll be providing all of our partners a *Partner's Toolkit*. The Toolkit has everything to generate publicity at the grassroots level and in local media – community newspapers, newsletters, local radio and local TV. Each partner will have the

opportunity to put their organization's name and logo on these materials and public service announcements.

## Risk-Based Systems

As we discussed last year, FSIS is working in cooperation with its food safety partners to create a more robust risk-based inspection system for its meat and poultry processing facilities.

Today I want to outline the agency's most current thinking and the practical steps needed to begin the implementation of a dynamic risk-based inspection system for processing establishments.

First, I would like to talk briefly about why change is needed. I'd also like to make it clear how an enhanced risk-based inspection system for the processing of meat and poultry products will help to improve the safety of the U.S. food supply.

Our goal is to focus more of FSIS' time and valuable resources on prevention, rather than on response. What we're after is a common sense public health strategy that best serves the American consumer by preventing human illness.

I want to emphasize that a more robust risk-based inspection system for meat and poultry processing is not about saving money or decreasing FSIS' inspection force. Instead, it's

about spending our work hours in a smarter way with more time in the processing plants that need our assistance and expertise to better protect the public's health.

Ultimately, that's what this initiative is all about – lowering the chance that a consumer will contract a foodborne illness by reducing the prevalence of dangerous pathogens in the meat and poultry supply.

### The Three Plant Example

I want to illustrate – with an example of a processing inspector who has three processing plants to inspect – how a more robust risk-based inspection system would help the agency improve the safety of meat and poultry products from FSIS-inspected processing establishments.

On the X-axis of the chart attached, you will find the measure for establishment risk control. This measure is used to quantify how well potential risks are being controlled in FSIS-inspected processing establishments.

On the Y-axis you will see the measure for inherent product risk, which also takes product volume into consideration. This is a science-based measure that is used to rank the intrinsic risk posed by a product independent of where it was produced, and was created in part through the use of an expert elicitation.

Formulas taking into account these various factors have been developed, and will be used to determine an establishment's level of inspection. Meetings are being held with our food safety partners to gather their input on these formulas.

Now, our first plant, let us call it Charlie's Chicken, produces an inherently high-risk product, ground poultry. Not only that, but this plant has a less than stellar food safety record with a list of repetitive noncompliance records as long as your arm; many of them very serious sanitation and hazard violations. For instance, the plant may have failed its last *Salmonella* set.

Our next example, Tina's Turkey, also produces ground poultry. But this plant is practically sparkling, spic-and-span. From the top management to the newest line employee, everyone in this plant is dedicated to putting out a safe product and it shows.

The plant has gone for years with very few noncompliance records and the results of its last two *Salmonella* testing sets have been very good. There have been no recalls, no consumer complaints, et cetera, at this plant.

Now our third plant today, Mark's Meats, has a record as spotless as the plant itself. Not only that, it produces canned hams rather than ground poultry, so the product risk is lower.

So our processing inspector knows perfectly well from years of consistent experience with all three plants that every day plants like Tina's Turkey and Mark's Meats will pass inspections with flying colors. Our processing inspector also knows that Tina's Turkey, even though it has just as good a record as Mark's meat, needs to be watched more closely because it produces a higher risk product than canned ham, namely the ground poultry.

On top of that, our processing inspector knows that Charlie's Chicken, which also produces ground poultry and has that slip shod record I mentioned earlier, needs to be watched extra closely.

But right now our processing inspector can't do that. Our inspector is forced to spend approximately the same amount of time inspecting each plant and doing the same inspection procedures for the day as assigned by the Performance Based Inspection System, or PBIS system, regardless of the level of risk to the public health that each one of these plants represents. A more dynamic risk-based inspection system will help to change that.

Under an enhanced risk-based inspection system in processing, we're still going to go to each plant everyday. But within the inspector's tour of duty, some plants will get a closer and more intensive look than others.

FSIS has strived to be very transparent throughout this important process. Specifically, since I last spoke before the Subcommittee, we have had five meetings with industry, five meetings with consumer organizations and three joint meetings that included both industry and consumer representatives. We have also held seven different employee meetings, all of which included representatives of our bargaining unit. Last October, we held a two-day workshop where, in addition to hearing from consumers, industry and employees, FSIS brought in official representatives of the inspector bargaining unit. We have also held biannual meetings with our National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection (NACMPI) on the topic of risk-based inspection systems since November 2005. Since May 2006, those biannual NACMPI meetings have also included active participation from employee association and union representatives.

Finally, the NACMPI recommended that we contract with a third-party to solicit and collect stakeholder input on risk-based inspection. We chose Resolve, Inc. Resolve's report to us made clear that all stakeholders agree that dedicating more inspection resources to those plants that are not demonstrating effective and consistent control of risk is a sound concept. In addition, we have posted all risk-based inspection materials on our Web site, written summaries of the information in both our employee and constituent publications and have requested that all interested parties submit written comments as well. This very transparent approach will not change as we begin to look toward implementing this dynamic system.

Ensuring the safety of meat and poultry products given the realities of today's modern supply chain requires that we have the ability to anticipate and more quickly respond to food safety challenges before they negatively affect public health. A more robust risk-based system offers us this ability.

### Next Steps

I want to assure you that we will be providing more details about these important steps as we move forward. All of our efforts in this area are in place to ensure that interested parties have ample opportunities to provide this needed comment to the agency. Our efforts will certainly include our employees, the employee associations, and the union throughout the development and implementation of our more robust risk-based inspection system for processing establishments.

While our current inspection methods will still be in place, new data systems are being developed that will better match the intensity of the inspection to the risks. These new systems will use automated data systems that help better measure the risk posed by the products a plant produces, as well as the processing establishment's ability to control those risks.

FSIS will also host a number of technical summits with stakeholders throughout the year to discuss current thinking and establish best practices.

Topics for these summits will include the use of noncompliance records, the use of production volume in making inspection decisions, the use of industry data to supplement FSIS inspection findings and finally, the design and use of expert elicitations and their outcomes.

Additionally, a technical summit on food attribution, co-hosted by CDC and FDA, will engage stakeholders, including State and local public health partners, to discuss data which links foodborne illness with inspected product.

We anticipate application of this dynamic risk-based inspection system at thirty prototype processing locations involving 254 processing plants this spring. As the agency gains experience from the initial prototype processing locations, we expect that the number of locations will expand to 150 locations by the end of 2007. I look forward to FSIS implementing this system for processing plants nationwide beginning as early as June 2008. To meet that goal, FSIS will first have to fully articulate the goals of this risk-based inspection system, design the mechanism for measuring its effectiveness, and begin its application in selected prototype processing locations. Evaluation and stakeholder input will be ongoing components as we carry out this necessary and important work.

A more robust risk-based inspection system will help guarantee to the American public that its meat and poultry products are being more effectively inspected using state-of-the-art data collection techniques and analysis. We believe that this will help to further increase the public's confidence that FSIS-inspected products are safe and wholesome.

I want to point out that our efforts to create an enhanced risk-based inspection system are just a natural outgrowth of what FSIS has already been doing over the past decade. For example, FSIS' HACCP regulations, *Listeria monocytogenes* rule, and 11-point *Salmonella* initiative are definitely risk-based.

### The *Salmonella* Challenge

In 2005, the CDC reported that there were 14.55 cases of reported illnesses from *Salmonella* per 100,000 people in the United States. This is in comparison to the Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2010 objective of 6.8 salmonellosis cases per 100,000 people. I do want to point out that this number accounts for illnesses from all sources, not just poultry. But based on FSIS' sampling data, the percentage of poultry samples testing positive for the pathogen had been an increasing concern, especially for young chicken (or broiler) carcasses which had risen to over 16 percent in 2005. It was clear that the poultry industry found itself at a crossroad.

Given this challenge, it was imperative to take a risk-based approach to investigating and controlling the incidence of *Salmonella* in meat and poultry products. In February 2006, FSIS announced an initiative to reduce *Salmonella* in meat and poultry products. It incorporated 11 points, including increased sampling in plants with the greatest control problems and quarterly publication of nationwide *Salmonella* data by product class.

FSIS carefully studied the *Salmonella* performance measure for poultry that was in place at the time and identified weaknesses. The FSIS regulatory testing program that's the source of the data used in the current performance measure did not provide a true measure of the pathogen's prevalence. For example, if samples from an establishment are only taken early in the first shift, then those samples are not providing us with an accurate understanding of the environment or the workforce characteristics of that establishment's second shift.

The second weakness was that the current standard is for generic *Salmonella* and includes serotypes that are not, or are rarely, attributed to foodborne illness. There are many known serotypes of *Salmonella* found in broilers. Each serotype that can cause human illness does so with varying severity.

That's why our 11-point initiative involves how we are using the serotypes from our regulatory samples, and putting resources into inspecting those plants posing the greatest risk to the public's health. I want to share with you some of the most recent developments, as we move forward in the war on *Salmonella* that was declared during the summer of 2005.

The initiative called for FSIS to place establishments into categories, based on their performance in controlling pathogens. All FSIS-inspected plants have now been placed into one of three categories based on how well they control *Salmonella* according to the

results of their two most recent sampling sets. In addition, we have begun a baseline study to develop a *Salmonella* performance standard in turkey carcasses.

Now, based on the category in which a plant is placed, the plant's sample set scheduling frequency has been modified according to how well the plant controls pathogens.

Previously, for every plant that failed a set, another sample set would be scheduled within the year. Now, establishments showing poor performance and poor process controls will be scheduled much more frequently, with a second set begun almost immediately following the failed set, and perhaps if needed, multiple sets and a food safety assessment all within a year's time. Establishments that are showing good control of *Salmonella* at less than half of the existing performance standard or guidance for two consecutive sets will have the next set run between 12 and 24 months.

This is an ongoing process and FSIS is dedicated to monitoring a plant's progress in controlling *Salmonella*. We're here to help those plants that are having difficulty moving into the top category that demonstrates an excellence in their pathogen control processes. And it is working. The percentage of broiler plants in this top category has risen from 35 percent (66 plants) at the end of the first quarter of 2006, to 49 percent (93 plants) by the end of 2006.

In addition to the agency's *Salmonella* initiative, the agency asked the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF) to make recommendations regarding an appropriate sampling methodology for a statistically valid and scientifically

designed baseline study for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in chickens. In September 2005, NACMCF submitted its recommendations. The agency has completed a shake-down phase to finalize laboratory procedures, and will begin the study this spring. The study will take about a year to complete, and will involve the collection and analysis of about 4,500 samples.

### Retail Consignee Proposed Rule

Enhancing our risk-based inspection system and improving how we conduct baseline studies are great examples of how we're looking at every process along the farm-to-table continuum to see where improvements and enhancements can be made in order to improve public health protections. However, we are not just stopping at our inspection system or risk-based policies. We've also been looking at the recall process to see how we can better protect the public with new approaches made possible by a careful examination of the food safety environment in which we all operate.

It's critical that during a recall, product that is believed to be adulterated be quickly and efficiently removed from consumers' refrigerators and pantries as well as from store shelves and freezers. But it's also important to ensure that only the dangerous or misbranded product is removed from circulation.

On March 7, 2006, FSIS published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* that will make retail consignee information available to the public during a food recall. We held a

public meeting in April to discuss the proposed changes, and FSIS is currently analyzing the comments we have received.

I recognize that this is a contentious issue for some and we're committed to addressing concerns in an open, transparent manner before we decide how to move forward.

But making retail consignee information available to the public will help to better publicize this valuable information that can help save lives. The elderly and very young, who are far less likely to learn about recalls by visiting FSIS' Web site on a computer, will be better protected. Simply put, this rule will strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of our current recall procedures by providing consumers additional information that empowers them to protect themselves and their families.

Experience has shown that during a public health emergency, early, detailed, accurate and consistent information is one of our greatest tools to prevent panic, illnesses and a collapse in consumer confidence. By working closely with our partners at all levels of government, industry and consumers, we can ensure that the public has the information they need to keep themselves and their families safe.

## FY 2008 Budget Request

I appreciate having the opportunity to present some of FSIS and the Office of Food Safety's biggest accomplishments and priorities to you. Now, I would like to offer an overview of the FY 2008 budget request for FSIS.

Implementation of these budget initiatives is imperative to helping us fulfill FSIS' public health mission. In FY 2008, FSIS is requesting an appropriation of \$930.1 million.

### Maintaining the High Standard in Meat, Poultry & Egg Product Inspections

Key to maintaining our high standard in meat and poultry inspections is the agency's permanent statutory obligation to provide inspection of meat, poultry and egg products. This effort is a labor intensive mandate, thereby making its salary and benefit costs relatively inflexible. An increase for the FSIS inspection program is requested to enhance the safety and wholesomeness of meat, poultry and egg products through effective inspection and policy implementation. This amount includes funding for a government-wide, mandated 3 percent pay raise for FSIS employees in FY 2008, for changes in salaries for FY 2007 and FY 2008, for the increased costs of benefits, for the inflationary costs of the State Meat and Poultry Inspection programs, and for two extra work days in FY 2008. Failure to provide the full amount for pay and benefit costs jeopardizes the effectiveness of FSIS programs and weakens food safety. In addition to increased costs for pay and benefits, the agency requests an increase in funds to support the increased demand for front-line inspection services, and a decrease in funding for the

public health data infrastructure system (formerly the Field Automation and Information Management Project or FAIM).

#### Improving the Efficiency & Effectiveness of the Risk-Based Inspection Systems

I have already spoken about our efforts to move to a more robust risk-based inspection system in processing establishments. I would like to point out that we are in the early stages of examining how to implement a risk-based system in slaughter, especially poultry slaughter. At the October 2006 meeting of the NACMPI, FSIS solicited input from Committee members regarding risk-based inspection for poultry slaughter, and the agency will continue to move forward in a transparent process. It is important to mention that our risk-based inspection proposal for poultry slaughter is cost-neutral for FY 2008.

#### Food & Agriculture Defense Initiative

We seek an increase for food and agriculture defense. This includes increases for the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN); for two data systems to support FERN; to enhance laboratory capabilities; to conduct biosecurity training; and additional funds for food security activities such as surveillance and monitoring.

#### User Fees

Inspection services for the cost of Federal meat, poultry and egg products during all approved shifts are paid with Federal funds, and our budget submission assumes that this will continue. In addition, the Administration will be proposing legislation to provide USDA with the authority to collect new user fees, including a licensing fee and a

performance fee. The collection of these new user fees, which we estimate would amount to \$96 million during FY 2008, would not be available until FY 2009. A total of about \$92 million in licensing fees would be collected from establishments based on their inspection services. An additional \$4 million in performance fees would be collected from establishments that require additional inspection activities for performance failures such as retesting, recalls, or inspection activities linked to an outbreak.

## Closing

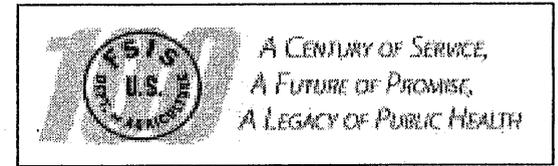
Before we move on to your questions, I want to assure everyone that we have a strong food safety system in place, and that's due in large part to the work of everyone here today.

But the state of public health is constantly evolving and we must evolve with it. We can't afford to let ourselves, our partners or our Nation's food safety systems stagnate. The policies and initiatives I have reviewed here today will ensure the evolution of food safety.

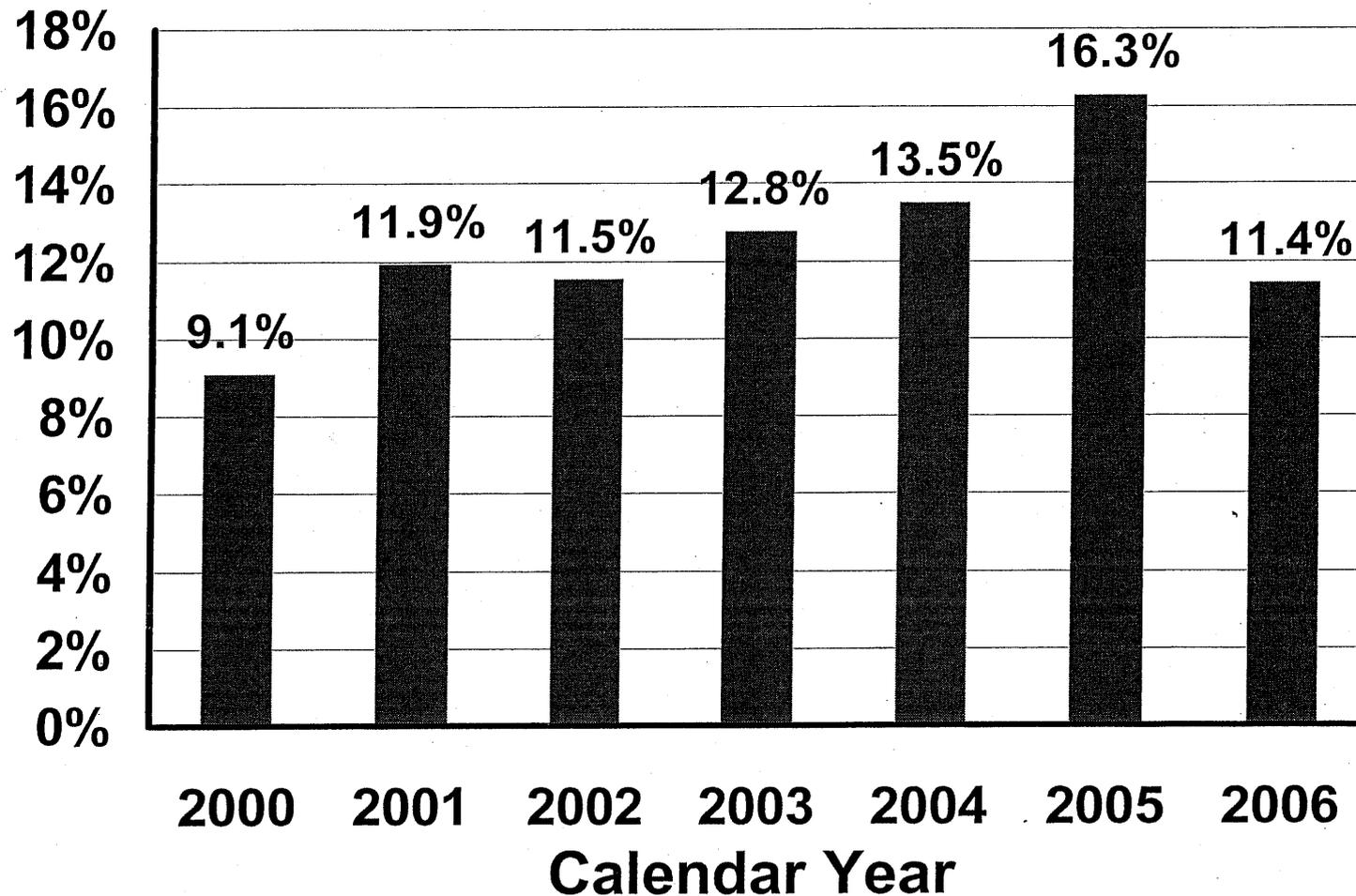
Public health is a lot like riding a bicycle. If we're not moving forward, then we're falling down and in public health there's no such thing as training wheels. That's why it's so critical that we all work together to create the most effective food safety policies possible that will allow us to keep moving forward.

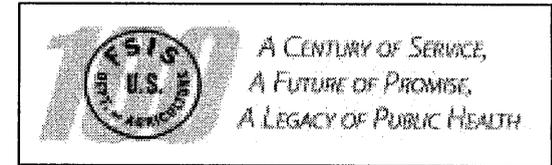
We will continue to engage the scientific community, consumers, public health experts, Congress, our own employees and all interested parties in an effort to identify science-based solutions to public health issues to ensure positive public health outcomes. We all know that we can save lives with sensible science-based policies and together we'll do just that.

Madam Chairwoman, thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to address the Subcommittee and submit testimony regarding the steps that FSIS is taking to remain a world leader in food safety and public health. I look forward to working with you to improve our food safety system, ensuring that the United States continues to have the safest food supply in the world.



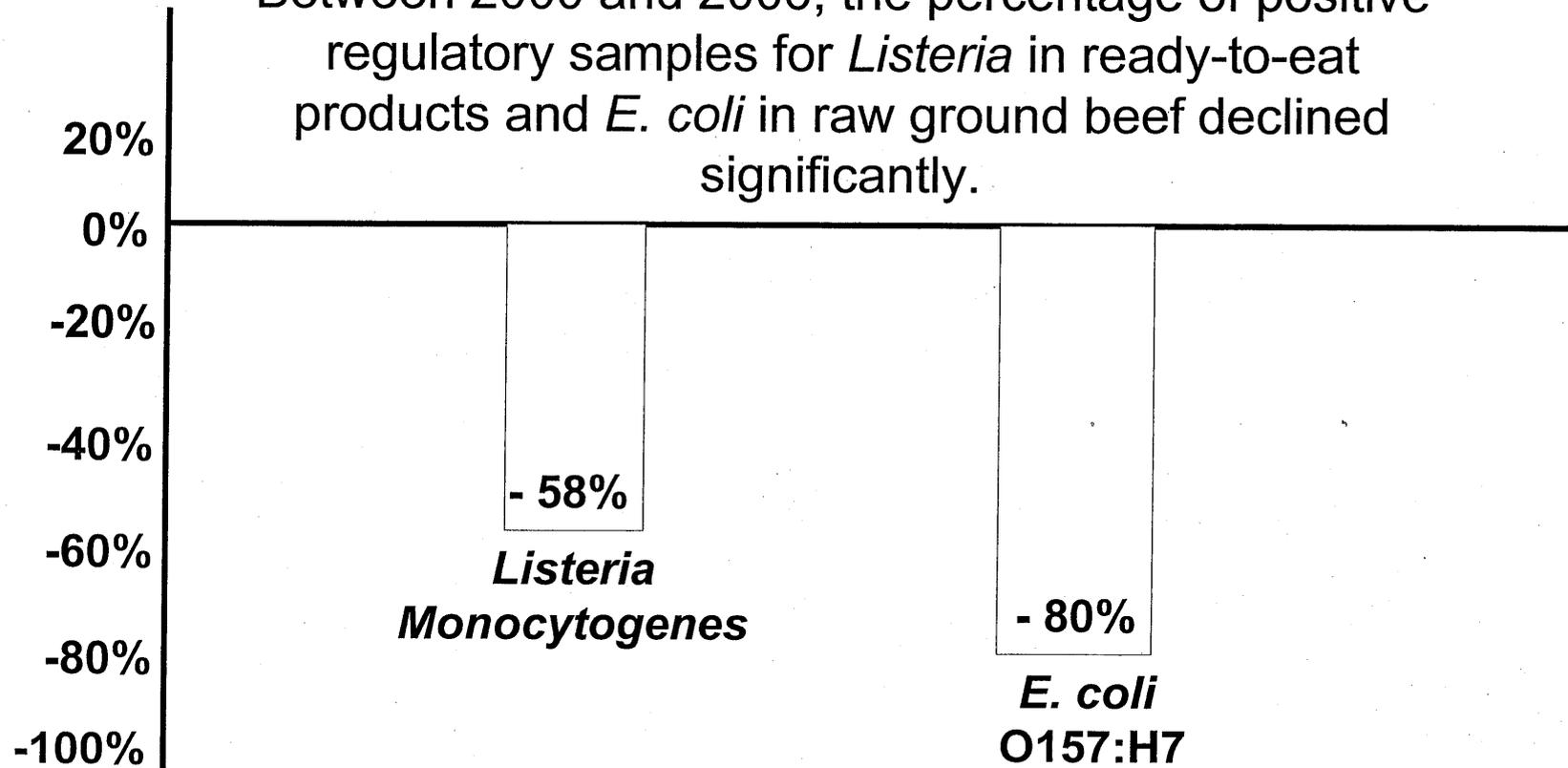
# Percentage of Positive Regulatory Samples in Broilers for *Salmonella*

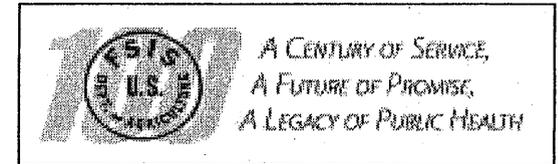




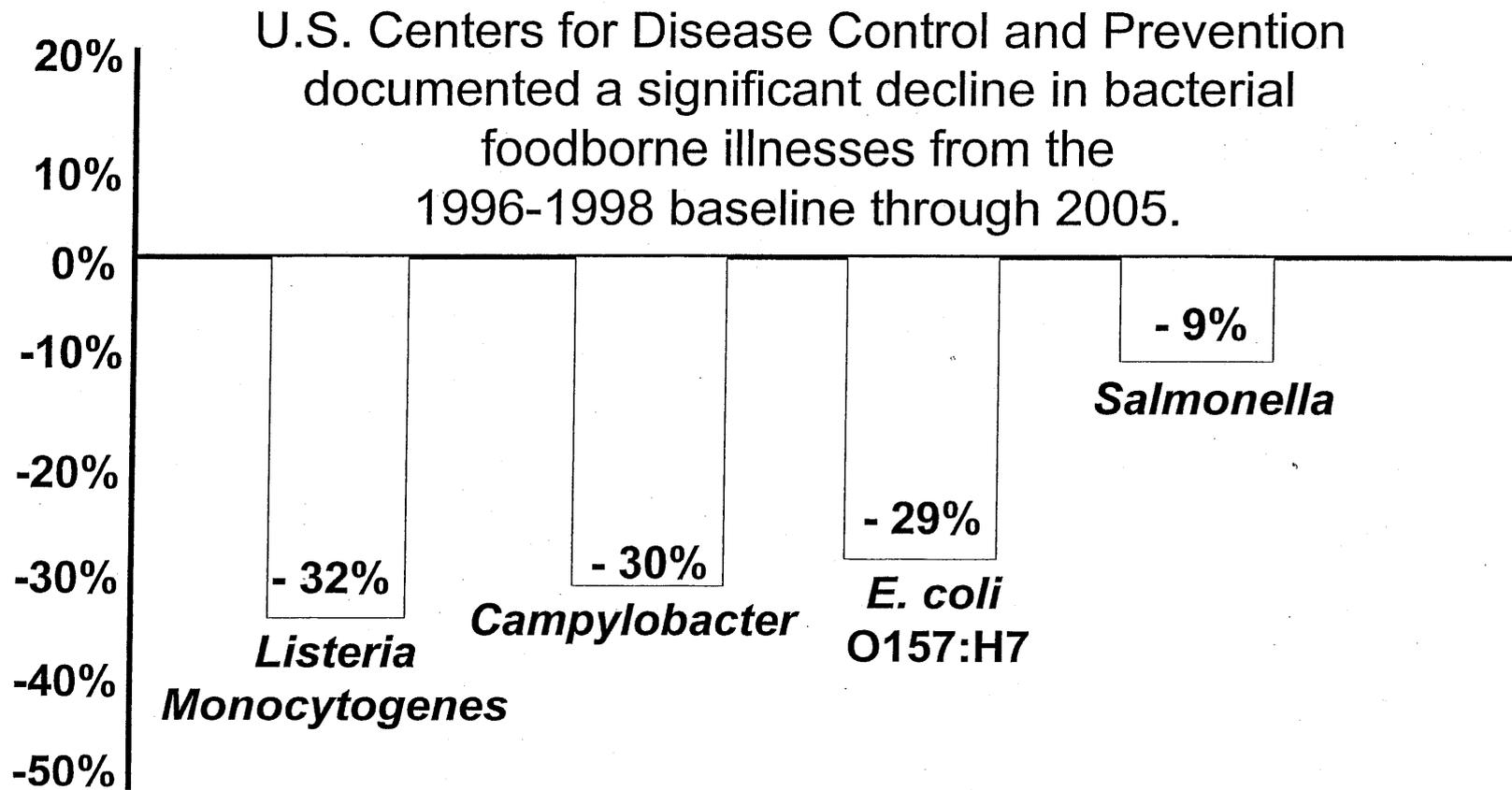
# The Decline in the Percentage of Positive Regulatory Samples

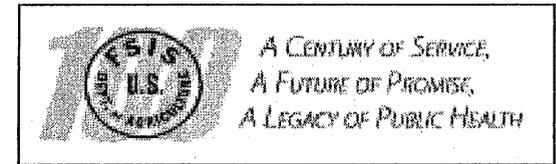
Between 2000 and 2006, the percentage of positive regulatory samples for *Listeria* in ready-to-eat products and *E. coli* in raw ground beef declined significantly.





# The Decline of Infections from Foodborne Pathogens





## Risk Combinations

<b>Inherent Product Risk</b>	<i>High</i>	3	<b>Tina's Turkey</b> 3A	3B	<b>Charlie's Chicken</b> 3C
	<i>Medium</i>	2	2A	2B	2C
	<i>Low</i>	1	<b>Mark's Meats</b> 1A	1B	1C
			<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
			<b>Processing Establishment Risk Control</b>		
			<i>Consistent</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>More Variable</i>