FSIS Offers Tips to Stay Food Safe During Spring Festivities

Spring celebrations call for traditional menu items that families may not prepare often during the year, so FSIS offers food safety tips to reduce the risk of foodborne illness when using unfamiliar cooking and serving methods.

Advice on preventing food poisoning while enjoying Easter eggs, ham and brisket can be found at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/NR_040212_01/index.asp. In addition, check out the FSIS video on its YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/usdafoodsafety, which demonstrates safe food handling for this time of the year.

Consumers with food safety questions can “Ask Karen,” the FSIS virtual representative, available 24 hours a day at www.AskKaren.gov or via smartphone at m.askkaren.gov. “Ask Karen” live chat services are available Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET.

The toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), is also available to consumers in English and Spanish and can be reached Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

FSIS Solicits Feedback on AskFSIS

FSIS launched a survey on March 22 which is designed to enhance the usability and efficiency of AskFSIS—a Web-based question-and-answer forum. The purpose of the survey is to ensure that all customers have the most helpful experience possible when accessing the application. Survey responses will be used to enhance customer service in the future. This survey is available through April 12, 2013.

To access the survey, go to http://bit.ly/165iO2Q. For questions regarding the survey, contact Brittini Brown at Brittini.Brown@fsis.usda.gov. For technical issues with accessing the survey, contact Yolanda Kennedy-Edwards at Yolanda.Kennedy@fsis.usda.gov. Note that responses are voluntary and will remain confidential.

In addition, as the agency looks for ways to improve AskFSIS, a new feature called the “Help” tab has been added. This tool allows customers to better interact with the application and manage their own AskFSIS accounts.
Industry Implementation of PHIS Underway

Last month, FSIS began rolling out the industry functionality of the Public Health Information System (PHIS) to FSIS-inspected domestic establishments and official import inspection establishments. A full implementation schedule for each district is listed below. This part of the system gives industry the ability to respond and view noncompliance records and file appeals.* It also gives industry the ability to view, export to a PDF, and print reports of sampling results, noncompliance records (NR), and the establishment profile.

Participation in PHIS is voluntary. Implementation for industry will be conducted in phases through a web registration process. Establishments will receive a letter with the implementation schedule, as well as instructions on the web registration process. An electronic copy of the letter can be found on the FSIS website at http://1.usa.gov/YLp0aZ.

Start dates are designated for establishments associated with each FSIS district and regional import field office. Establishments will not be able to access the system before the scheduled start dates.

PHIS users with questions or issues may contact the FSIS Service Desk at 1-800-473-9135. As a reminder, if an establishment elects to use PHIS, a Level 2 USDA eAuthentication (eAuth) account must be obtained to enroll and access the system. Steps for obtaining an eAuth account have been published in the FSIS Constituent Update and are available on the FSIS website.

- February 25, 2013 – Alameda
- March 4, 2013 – Atlanta
- March 11, 2013 – Chicago and Dallas
- March 18, 2013 – Denver, Des Moines and all official import inspection establishments
- March 25, 2013 – Jackson and Philadelphia
- April 1, 2013 – Raleigh and Springdale

*NOTE: The appeals functionality is not available for industry use at this time, but will be in the near future.

FSIS Launches Small Plant News Survey

FSIS is conducting a survey through its Small Plant News, the newsletter written especially for small and very small federally inspected establishment owners and operators who produce meat, poultry and processed egg products.

The survey takes only a few minutes and will assist the agency in improving the quality of Small Plant News to better serve the needs of its stakeholders.

The deadline to complete the survey is March 31. To do so, go to the Volume 6, No. 4 issue of Small Plant News at http://1.usa.gov/1dSIBs. Click on the survey button on the first page.
Microbiology Method Updates

**FSIS Campylobacter Laboratory Method Has Been Extended for Analysis of Raw Poultry Products**

The *Campylobacter* method has been extended to include quantitative analysis of raw poultry products. The revision also contains additional options for isolate storage and transport. The Microbiology Laboratory Guidebook (MLG) method chapter MLG 41.02, the associated method flowcharts (MLG 41 Appendix 1.00 and MLG 41 Appendix 2.00) and updated media preparation instruction chapter MLG Appendix 1.07 will be posted to the MLG. FSIS intends to begin using this method on May 1, 2013. To review the guidebook, visit [www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Microbiological_Lab_Guidebook/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Microbiological_Lab_Guidebook/index.asp).

**FSIS Salmonella Laboratory Method Has Been Extended to a 325 gram (g) Sample Portion for Raw Poultry Product**

FSIS laboratories have validated a 325 g analytical portion option for *Salmonella* analysis of raw poultry products. The Microbiology Laboratory Guidebook (MLG) method chapters MLG 4.06, MLG 4C.04 and associated method flow chart MLG 4 Appendix 2.00 will be posted to the MLG. FSIS intends to begin using it on May 1, 2013. To review the guidebook, visit [www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Microbiological_Lab_Guidebook/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Microbiological_Lab_Guidebook/index.asp).

**FSIS Salmonella Laboratory Method Has Been Extended to a 325 gram (g) Sample Portion for Raw Beef Product**

FSIS laboratories have validated a 325 g analytical portion option for *Salmonella* analysis of raw beef. The Microbiology Laboratory Guidebook (MLG) method chapters MLG 4.06, MLG 4C.04 and associated method flow chart MLG 4 Appendix 2.00 will be posted to the MLG. FSIS intends to begin using it on May 1, 2013. To review the guidebook, visit [www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Microbiological_Lab_Guidebook/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Microbiological_Lab_Guidebook/index.asp).

**FSIS to Add an Optional Test Prior to Performing Confirmatory Test Procedures**

Agency laboratories will add an option to perform a ribosomal RNA-based test prior to confirmatory testing procedures on positive colonies in order to minimize the number of presumptive positive colonies that move forward to confirmatory testing. This change will contribute to laboratory efficiency without adding time required to report sample results. The FSIS Microbiology Laboratory Guidebook (MLG) method chapter, MLG 8.09, and the associated method flow chart, MLG 8 Appendix 1.01, will include this test as an option and will be posted to the MLG. FSIS intends to begin using this test on May 1, 2013. To review the guidebook, go to [www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Microbiological_Lab_Guidebook/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Microbiological_Lab_Guidebook/index.asp).

Visit USDA’s Blog

Every day, the USDA Blog shares something new about USDA’s expansive mission. The blog provides a rich and diverse look at the work within the department, spanning the nation—and even the world—and highlights the breadth of USDA programs and the role they play in the lives of every American.

Updates on FSIS Testing for *E. coli* and non-O157 STEC

Between June 4, 2012, and March 24, 2013, FSIS laboratory services analyzed a total of 2,267 beef trim samples (1,950 domestic and 317 imported) and 921 follow-up samples (852 domestic and 69 imported). Forty-six samples were found to be positive; 20 were domestic trim samples and 26 were domestic follow-up samples. To date, one sample has been positive for both O157:H7 and non-O157 STEC, and five samples have been positive for two different non-O157 O-groups.

To review testing results, go to http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Science/Ground_Beef_E.Coli_Testing_Results/index.asp.

Get Answers at AskFSIS

AskFSIS is a Web-based technology and policy question-and-answer forum on topics such as exporting, labeling, inspection, programs and procedures. In addition, AskFSIS offers Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds that link back to the Q&As. Visit http://askfsis.custhelp.com/ to view recently posted topics.