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Ronald Hicks, Deputy Administrator

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bea·con (bê' ken) *noun*
A signaling or guiding device, such as a lighthouse, located on a coast. A source of guidance or

RON'S CORNER

The Future of FSIS Veterinarians
by Ron Hicks
Deputy Administrator
Office of Management
Tel: 202-720-4425

During the last year I have been privileged to co-chair, along with Dr. Dale Boyle, Executive Vice President, National Association of Federal Veterinarians (NAFV), a Task Force looking at The Future of FSIS Veterinarians: Public Health Professionals for the 21st Century. That is also the title of a draft report that the Task Force has issued.

Administrator Tom Billy requested that the Task Force do the following:

- Define how veterinarians can contribute to the Agency's vision of risk-free food.
- Identify the opportunities to best use the FSIS veterinarians to optimize public health from farm to table.
- Assess the impact of HACCP on the duties and role of veterinarians.
- Identify expertise needed by the Agency as it relates to skills possessed by veterinarians.
- Define the international role of veterinarians, and assess the implications within the international community.
- Identify potential uses of technology.

This was particularly important as the Agency implements HACCP systems and pathogen reduction requirements for meat and poultry. Moreover, the Task Force was requested to look beyond current statutory and regulatory limitations to a visionary future. The Task Force was made up of a diverse group of individuals including veterinarians from inside and outside of FSIS, a variety of FSIS management personnel, and individuals affiliated with academia, non-government organizations, and foreign governments.

The Task Force's draft report makes recommendations on the following issues:

I. Defining the role of the FSIS veterinarian
II. Education, training, recognition and recruitment
III. Partnerships
IV. Coordinated databases and animal identification
V. Veterinary contributions to international credibility of FSIS

The draft report is available on the FSIS Homepage at http://www.fsis.usda.gov
To get discussion of the draft report, we will hold a public meeting on February 1, 2000, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., at the Washington Plaza Hotel, Washington, DC.

We welcome FSIS employees at the meeting; or, you may send comments to Linda Russell of the Planning Staff via e-mail or telephone (202-501-7138).

After the public meeting, the Task Force will look at all comments, from FSIS employees and other constituents, and prepare a final report.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

FSIS Strategic Plan
by Linda Russell
Planning Staff
Tel: 202-501-7138

As the new millennium begins, FSIS is launching its new Strategic Plan that will bring a new level of food safety in the new Century.

FSIS senior executives have begun the process of creating a new plan, which is for 2001through 2006. The plan will coincide with the 100th year of Federal meat inspection. In recognition of this important anniversary, our new strategic goal

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is to eliminate foodborne illness caused by meat, poultry, and egg products with a target of a 50 percent reduction in foodborne illness by 2006. The goal may sound ambitious, but Tom Billy has said: "The only way to achieve the level of food safety that American consumers deserve is to extend science and our stretch our imaginations."

To achieve the goal, seven objectives have been identified. Mr. Billy believes that achieving these objectives, and therefore the goal, will launch FSIS into a whole new era of food regulation.

The objectives are:

1. Promote a national research and new technology infrastructure to ensure adequate scientific support for food safety risk assessment and risk management from farm to table.

2. Create and use a national and international risk assessment capability for meat, poultry, and egg products.

3. Create a coordinated national and international food safety risk management system for meat, poultry, and egg products from farm to table.

4. Ensure that all people, particularly consumers, who produce, process, handle, prepare or come in contact with meat, poultry, and egg products, understand, accept and take responsibility for food safety.

5. Identify and eliminate risk associated with the production of meat, poultry, and egg products.

6. Identify and eliminate the risk associated with processing, transporting, storing, retailing and delivering meat, poultry, and egg products to consumers.

7. Develop and maintain an infrastructure to support and achieve Agency objectives.

Each objective will be a major initiative for the Agency. They are crosscutting among program areas. Everything that FSIS does, or is budgeted to do, will fit under these seven objectives. They will be the basis for budget requests to the Under Secretary of Food Safety, Dr. Catherine Woteki. Major committees have been formed to develop the activities to meet each objective. The committees will report back to the Administrator by February 18, 2000.

After the committees have provided more details for the Draft Strategic Plan, FSIS will fully involve its employees and constituents. The Agency is dedicated to continuing the open process it has engaged in for the last several years. Nothing is more important than planning how to eliminate foodborne illness caused by meat, poultry, and egg products.

FSIS knows the benefits of a well-developed strategic plan. For the last several years, we have been implementing the major initiatives contained in our Strategic Plan for 1997-2002. On January 25, 2000, when very small plants come under HACCP, we will have completed almost all of the activities contained in that strategic plan. In that plan, as well as the new plan, it is truly the dedicated work of all FSIS employees that moves the Agency ahead in its mission of food safety.

TRAVEL

Travel Management Centers to Charge Transaction Fee
by Barbara McNiff
Budget Division
Tel: 202-720-3061

Some Travel Management Centers (travel agencies under contract with the General Services Administration (GSA)) are starting to charge transaction fees for every ticket they issue. These fees can range from $15 to $25. If you are assessed such a transaction fee, you can claim it as a miscellaneous expense on your travel voucher. While GSA may later determine this fee is a transportation expense, currently, we are being instructed to claim it as a miscellaneous expense.

Updates to Directive 3800.1, Temporary Duty Travel Within CONUS

An amendment to FSIS Directive 3800.1 containing the new per diem rates which will become effective January 1, 2000 will be issued shortly. This directive will also contain the Agency's new policy on payment of laundry expenses. If GSA has obtained approval for a mileage rate increase, that will also be in the revised directive.

Bank of America Policy Regarding Delinquent Visa Travel Accounts
by Sue Ayers
Budget Division
Tel: 202-720-5068

There are several fees that the travel card contractor may assess to FSIS travelers. The fees are listed below with an explanation.

- The Bank of America (BOA) does not charge any interest fee to any delinquent accounts. However, BOA does charge a $20 late fee to any account that becomes 121 days delinquent with undisputed charges.
- Return Check Fee(s) are $20 for any payment returned, regardless of the reason.
- The ATM Cash Advance Fee is 1.9 % of the amount of each ATM cash advance received. This is reimbursable by claiming on the travel voucher under MISCELLANEOUS.
- Delinquent and Collection Charges: Cardholders whose accounts are referred to an attorney for collection will be responsible for attorney fees, if

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assessed, not to exceed 25% of the account balance, plus other collection costs and court costs.

- Late Fee(s): As indicated above, a late fee of $20 will be charged to any 121-day delinquent account. An additional $20 late fee will be charged to the account each month thereafter if an unpaid balance remains.

Delinquent and Suspended Accounts:

Accounts that have undisputed balances that are not paid in full within 61 calendar days from the closing date of the statement where those charges first appeared will be suspended and further charges will be prohibited until full payment is received for the total delinquent amount, unless otherwise directed by the Agency.

Agency Program Coordinator's (APC's) can have suspended accounts opened for designated amounts of charges within designated timeframes by (a) by verifying the nonpayment was through no fault of the cardholder, (b) declaring a critical status need, and (c) by providing an estimated date that the travel reimbursements will be received by the cardholder, where upon receipt of, full payment will be made to BOA.

Cancellations:

Accounts that have undisputed balances that are not paid in full within 126 calendar days from the closing date of the statement where those charges first appeared will be cancelled and no further charges will be allowed. BOA may reinstate a cancelled account upon full payment of the amount due and any late fee(s) assessed.

Accounts suspended two times during a 12-month period for nonpayment of undisputed principal amounts and becomes past due again—in this case, means payment not received within 45 calendar days from closing date of statement in which the charge(s) first appeared may be cancelled.

Expediting Payments by Telephone:

Cardholders may make telephone payment(s) for suspended or cancelled accounts to BOA for by calling 1-888-619-2938. They will provide their Visa account number, expiration date, security verification, name of bank with city and State location, check number, routing number (first 9 numbers at bottom of check reading from left to right), and daytime telephone number. (They should void that particular check to prevent further use.) It may take from 24 hours to as much as 72 hours to post to their Visa account, a number of factors involved. If immediate travel is required, the appropriate APC will need to be contacted to verify this action.
(This payment method may also be used for Visa accounts in good standing by calling 1-800-472-1424 (the number on the back of the card) and selecting option 1 to speak with a customer service representative.

Cardholders Agreement:

This is the Agreement on the charge card application. By signing the charge card and/or using the card, cardholders agree to the terms and conditions of the agreement, and thereby, agree to pay certain fees and charges.

WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Workforce of the Future
Focus on: Projects Helping FSIS Reach the Workforce of the Future
by Yvonne Davis, Chair
Tel: 202-720-5632

Under "Ron's Corner," you will see an article on the work of the task force on the Veterinarian of the Future. That is only one of many projects whose results will help to design the Workforce of the Future for the Food Safety System of the Future. The Workforce of the Future Steering Committee is tracking the activities of the key projects and initiatives outlined in Attachment 1 of this edition of the *Beacon*. Look for updates in future issues of the *Beacon* on each of these initiatives.

Questions about the Workforce of the Future can be directed to: Workforce of the Future (on Outlook); or to one of the following members of the steering committee: John Esgar (in the Minneapolis HRFO) at 800-370-3747, Joanne Bolton, Sharin Sachs, or Yvonne Davis in Washington, DC, at 202-720-5362.

MAIL MANAGEMENT

Mail Tips
by Carol Lee Zrioka
Administrative Services Division
Tel: 301-504-4215

Here are some helpful tips for you to insure you receive your mail in a timely manner. Make sure when giving out your address it is complete. Remember the Postal Address and Courier Address may be different. Couriers do not ship to P.O. Boxes.

Dual Addressing:
When a post office box number and a street address are used, make sure that the place where you want the mail delivered appears on the line immediately above the city, state, and ZIP Code line and that the ZIP Code or ZIP+4 code corresponds to that address.

Addressing Tips:

- Write, type, or print the complete address neatly.
- Always use a return address.
- Always use complete address information; such as the suffixes AVE, BLVD, and ST. Always include locators such as the apartment or suite number.

- Always use correct directionals, such as N, W, and SW.
- Don't let an incorrect ZIP Code delay delivery of your mail. Local post offices and the Postal Service web site, www.usps.gov, offer ZIP Code information.
- Use the four-digit add-on, ZIP+4, in your addressing. Hyphenate the ZIP+4.
- Always use the two-letter state abbreviations.

Place endorsements for special services, such as Priority Mail, First-Class Mail, or insured, above the destination address and below and to the right of the return address.

HUMAN RESOURCES

November / December Retirements

Estrella N. Agamata, Chemist, OPHS, Alameda, CA, 12/03/99, 16 Years
Leonard T. Aiello, FI, OFO, Boston, MA, 11/30/99, 11 Years
Karen B. Alston, FI, OFO, Fremont, NE, 11/20/99, 11 Years
Ivan L. Clark, CSI, OFO, Woodland, WA, 11/20/99, 30 Years
Jimmy P. Eaves, FI, OFO, Perry, IA, 11/20/99, 5 Years
Ronald G. Henderson, CSI, OFO, Oklahoma City, OK, 12/03/99, 30 Years
Arthur D. Hinton, CSI, OFO, Tyler, TX, 12/03/99, 31 Years
Thomas W. Kline, CSI, OFO, Dubuque, IA, 11/30/99, 36 Years
Jerome L. Konshak, CSI, OFO, DePere, WI, 11/30/99, 11 Years
Jerry D. Long, FI, OFO, Shelbyville, TN, 12/03/99, 30 Years
Walter R. Olsted, DDM, Minneapolis, MN, 12/03/99, 35 Years
Robert A. Sandor, FI, OFO, Marion Center, PA, 12/03/99, 31 Years
Gilbert L. Schoba, CSI, OFO, Denison, IA, 12/03/99, 32 Years
Nathan Sellers, Jr., FI, OFO, Rome, NY, 12/03/99, 35 Years
Frank Trongone, Supvy FI, OFO, New York MY, 12/03/99, 34 Years
Herbert H. Turk, CSI, OFO, Denham Springs, LA, 12/03/99, 42 Years

Deaths-In-Service

Mr. Darrel D. Harlow, Dinuba, CA, CSI, OFO, 12/10/99

Leave Transfer Recipients

1. Martha Stamps
   OFO, AR; Serious Illness
2. Jackie Copeland
   OFO, DC; Illness
3. Annie Stewart
   POB, MN; Serious Illness
4. Kasturi Basu
   OFO, DC; Surgery
5. Linda Cole
   OPPDE, DC; Serious Illness
6. Sonya West
   OPPDE, DC; Maternity
7. Joyce Schultz
   POB, MN; Serious Illness
8. OFO-98-0031*
   OFO, AR; Serious Illness
9. Stephanie Showell
   OFO, DE; Family Illness
10. Michael Schwochert
    OFO, CO; Surgery
11. Willia Stepney
    OM, DC; Maternity
12. Michelle Carpenter
    OFO, OH; Complications w/pregnancy
13. Linda Carey
    EMS, DC; Surgery
14. Nancy Clyburn
    OPHS, DC; Surgery
15. OFO-99-0007*
    OFO, SC; Serious Illness
16. George Olson
    OFO, MN; Family Illness
17. Kellie Upshaw
    EMS, DC; Maternity
18. Traci Edmond
    EMS, DC; Maternity
19. Mary Sutton
    OPHS, GA; Complications w/pregnancy
20. Cheryl Evans
    OFO, AR; Surgery
21. Marilyn Weber
    FPC, IA; Illness
22. Robert Martz
    OFO, IA; Serious Illness
23. Alma Lindsey
    OFO, IL; Illness
24. Joseph Banales
    OFO, CA; Illness
25. Lorraine Kauffman
    OM, DC; Maternity
26. Charles Olson
    OFO, WI; Serious Illness
27. Betty Morgan
    OFO, AR; Family Illness
28. Carolyn Woolfolk
    OFO, DC; Surgery
29. Donna Ogdahl
    OFO, MN; Surgery
30. OFO-99-002*
    OFO, NC, Surgery
31. Carol Leonard
    OM, IA; serious Illness
32. Theresa Spoering
    OFO, MN; Surgery
33. OFO-99-0033*
    OFO, TX
34. OFO-99-0034*
    OFO, SD; Family Illness
35. Karen Wratchford
    OFO, KY; Surgery
36. Maureen Murphy
    OFO, OK; Surgery
37. Tammy Love
    OFO, AR; Surgery
38. Steve Engels
    OFO, IA; Serious Illness
39. Sue Engels
    OFO, IA; Family Illness
40. Michael Craig
    OFO, NE; Family Illness
41. Nicole Wareham
    OFO, IN; Maternity
42. Michelle Long
    OM, DC; Surgery
43. Glenda Snyders
    OFO, KS; Surgery
44. Angela Cuello
    OFO, TX; Serious Illness
45. Mona Eder
    OFO, IL; Maternity
46. Gary Palubicki
    OFO, MN; Surgery
47. Aurbrey Tribble
    OFO, FL; Serious Illness
48. Jacqueline Bonner
    OFO, AL; Surgery
49. OFO-99-0047*
    IA, Surgery
50. Clement Grangier
    OFO, MD, Serious Illness
51. John Buscemi
    OM, DC: Surgery

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* While not consenting to the publication of their names, certain LTP recipients are assigned a number that they may provide to their co-workers if they choose so that donated leave may be transferred to their account. Any questions on the LTP should be referred to the Human Resources Field Office on 1-800-370-3747 for field employees and to the Classification and Compensation Branch for HQ employees on 202-720-6287.

Performance Appraisal Ratings (A-L GS Employees)
by Classification, Performance, and Recognition Section
Human Resources Division
Tel: 612-370-2000

Remember that February 28 is the closing date for the performance appraisal rating cycle for employees, grade 1-12, whose last name begins with A-L. This includes those in-plant supervisors in grades 11-12 who were issued new standards and elements under the new Users' Guide for field supervisors. Those employees covered under User's Guides are to be rated on the FSIS 4430-5 forms, which were signed by employees and supervisors last year. For those employees not covered by User's Guides, use FSIS Form 4430-7 to complete the rating and FSIS Form 4430-6 to establish new standards for the upcoming rating cycle.

All ratings for this cycle should be completed no later than March 31, 2000. Employees should be given advance notice of the discussion so that they have to opportunity to prepare.

(For Bargaining Unit Employees, Please Note: The Collective Bargaining Agreement, Article XXI, Section B, states that "periodic reviews between a bargaining unit employee and the rating supervisor shall take place every 4 months during the appraisal period. One of these reviews shall coincide with the discussion of the annual performance rating." Therefore, supervisors should remember to include this final review when conducting the annual performance appraisal with the employee.)

The Performance Appraisal - Performance Standards Connection

Employees must have at least 90 days under their performance standards before they can be rated. The 90-day rating period begins on the date that the employee signs the standard. Some supervisors have erroneously thought that the rating period began the date that the employee was placed under their supervision.

The result is that the employee may not receive or sign their performance standards until weeks later. Failure to have the standards signed by the employee in a timely manner can cause the employee not to be rated during a 90-day detail or a short period under the supervisor. It may also cause problems at the end of the rating cycle when employees have less than 90 days under their performance standards. Therefore, one of the first things a supervisor should do at the beginning of a rating period or when a new employee comes under their supervision is to place performance standards in effect. This is done by discussing the standards with the employee and by obtaining the employee's signature on the performance standards form. If you have any questions regarding performance standards or the performance appraisal process, contact the Human Resources Field Office on 1-800-370-3747 (field employees) or the Performance, Evaluation and Recognition Branch on 202-720-7983 (headquarters employees)).

Designation of Beneficiary Alert!
by Benefits and Workers Compensation Section
Human Resources Division
Tel: 612-370-2000

Joe meets Louise. They fall in love. Joe marries Louise. Joe loves Louise so much that he names her as his beneficiary for all his Government benefits. He doesn't have to, but he does. Then Joe and Louise begin to fight and fight and fight. They divorce. Joe meets Betty. She helps him out of his depression and they fall in love. Joe and Betty marry. They do not fight. But then Joe dies. Betty tries to collect Joe's life insurance only to discover that Joe never cancelled his designation of Louise as his beneficiary. Louise, his ex-wife, collects the life insurance; Betty, his current wife, receives only the survivor annuity. This is not a fable, this actually happened. If you have any questions about Designation of Beneficiary forms for any Government benefit or would just like to be assured that you haven't followed in Joe's footsteps, contact your Human Resources Office in Washington, DC (headquarters) or Minneapolis, Minnesota (field) for assistance.

Direct Deposit Sign-Up
by Pay and Leave Section
Human Resources Division
Tel: 612-370-2000

Currently all FSIS employees use the SF Form 1199A, Direct Deposit Sign-Up, to enroll in the direct deposit program.

However, FSIS employees may also now use the FMS Form 2231, FASTSTART Direct Deposit Form to enroll in the direct deposit program. The FASTSTART Direct Deposit Form simplifies the enrollment process by eliminating the employee's need to visit their financial institution to obtain a routing transit number and the signature of the financial institution's representative. The FASTSTART Form should be requested through

the contacts listed below. The FASTSTART Form may be reproduced locally. Please keep in mind that either the FASTSTART Direct Deposit Form, FMS Form 2231 or the Direct Deposit Sign-Up, SF Form 1199A may be used to enroll in the direct deposit program. These forms should be submitted directly to your servicing human resources office (for field employees, the Human Resources Field Office in Minneapolis (1-800-370-3747) and the Employment Services and Policy Branch for Headquarters employees (202-720-6617)). If you have any questions, please contact the appropriate office.

Thrift Savings Plan Rates

Attachment 2 to this edition of the *Beacon* contains the Thrift Savings Plan rates through November 1999.

VDIP

Resolving Disputes without a Mediator

by Milo Christianson
Telephone: 612-370-2000
Kathy Welsh
Telephone: 202-720-5657
Labor and Employee Relations Division

Communication is generally a chaotic process. Speakers transmit messages to listeners by words, various voice qualities (e.g. volume, pitch, rhythm, inflection), and body language. Listeners must interpret and evaluate these messages. This can be a challenging task for a variety of reasons. Included among these is the fact that we evaluate and interpret the messages we hear through a number of filters such as past experience, values, and emotional involvement with the message. In addition, listening is hard work. And frequently it must compete with various distractions including noises, boredom, various physical ailments, and busy lives.

When people are engaged in conflict, an already chaotic process becomes even more chaotic, often to the point where effective communication is impossible. The goal of dispute resolution is to bring some order to this chaos. A mediator does this by providing the parties a structured process for listening to each other and pursuing resolution. Disputing parties can, however, do the same thing without the aid of a third party, if they have the commitment to do so and have a plan that will provide opportunities for listening and resolution. Only the parties can decide if they have sufficient commitment. If the commitment is there, however, the following is a process that they may find helpful in reaching a successful resolution of their dispute.

- *Agree to Talk.* When people are having a dispute, sometimes the most difficult thing to do is to agree to talk, particularly if the dispute is old and the parties' positions are fixed. But obviously this step must occur before resolution can begin. This is the commitment part. To make this happen, one party must be willing to step forward and reach out to the other party. Once this has been done, such details as where and when to meet and what the meeting ground rules should be can be decided. Typical subjects for ground rules include such things as how the parties will insure that each party gets an opportunity to talk, how the conversation will proceed, and what kinds of behavior (e.g., yelling, belittling, etc.) will be considered outside the boundaries of the conversation.

- *Figure Out What Needs to be Fixed.* When people meet to resolve a dispute, the first thing they must do is to figure out what has caused the dispute – that is, what needs to be fixed. Doing this is often difficult, even when a trained mediator is involved. Often the problems, issues and concerns that appear at the surface are not the same as those that are at the root of the dispute. Identifying these problems, issues and concerns requires the parties to be candid with each other and to take the time to do some serious examination of their work relationship.

- *Talk It Out.* Once the problems, issues, and concerns have been identified, the parties need to talk to each other and, most importantly, listen to each other. As noted in the December *Beacon*, active listening is the key to successful conflict resolution. When the parties set ground rules for their meeting, they should be firm about providing for an environment in which listening occurs. For example, one of the ground rules could be that each party will have an opportunity to make an opening statement without interruption by the other party. To work, of course, the parties must observe the ground rules. During mediation, it is one of the mediator's tasks to make certain that this happens. Without a mediator, it is the parties that must enforce the rule.

- *Look For a Solution.* Once the parties have had ample opportunity to express their feelings and concerns, it is time to move forward. When in conflict, our tendency is to look backward. We want to air feelings, often intense, about the other person, the organization, and so on. This kind of venting is a necessary part of the resolution process. More important, however, is the decision to move on, to look to the future, to find solutions. Unless disputing parties are willing to take this step, nothing will be accomplished. The key to successful solution identification, in addition to being candid and open-minded, is brainstorming – that process

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by which all ideas, great and small, practical and impractical, are put on the table for consideration. Once this process has been completed – that is, all ideas have been identified – it is time to select the idea or ideas that both parties can mutually accept. Once this has been done, it is best if the parties make a record of what they have agreed to do so that they have something for future reference.

Everyone can use the process described above to resolve disputes. If you believe that you need help, however, you can contact the Voluntary Dispute Intervention Program for assistance at 1-800-860-VDIP (8347), or 612-370-2033 in Minneapolis or 202-205-0066 in Headquarters.

SUPPLIES

Comments From the Cage
by Pete Bridgeman
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4222

("The Cage" is the area in the Landover warehouse where all Specialty Items, Accountable Forms, and Supply Items are stored.)

Greetings, and welcome to the new millenium (or is it still the last year of the old millenium?) There's been a lot going on here over the last few months. Beginning in October, when we moved all of the Supply Items from a separate warehouse into the Forms and Specialty Items Warehouse, then expanded the cage and combined all of the supply items with the Specialty Items in the cage, changed over to a Bar-code inventory system for the supply items, and then finally, brought all of the Forms and Specialty Items into the same new system in December, it's been busy. It looks like we finally have everything in order and are just about caught up on all of the backlog of orders, particularly for Supply Items. These got *way* behind while we went through all of this change. What should have only been about a week of downtime turned into several weeks, and a number of system problems occurred in transferring all of the data from the old supply system into the new consolidated system. For awhile there, it seemed that if it could go wrong, it did. This is usually the busiest time of year, anyway, and these problems just compounded that and we wound up playing catch-up through most of December. We know that some of you had to wait as long as 2 months to receive your supply items, and for that, we apologize.

The good news is, we finally have the new system up and running, we're just about all caught up on back-orders, and we're now in position to provide better service to you than ever. We're working with the information technology folks to make Electronic Ordering a reality for all field personnel, hopefully by the end of this fiscal year. We'll be talking with the National Joint Council of Food Inspector Locals about the best way to train field personnel in this new technology, but the bottom-line is, it will be user-friendly and relatively easy to learn, and will cut-out the time it takes your order to get to Landover in the mail and get input into the system once it's there. When you submit an order electronically, it will be out on the floor at Landover in the form of a pick ticket that same day. With the new system in place, this will be workable. We're also working on technology to improve the efficiency of supply delivery, and this we also hope to have in place by the end of this fiscal year. This will result in much quicker delivery times for supply items, while reducing shipping, storage, and related overhead costs.

If, for any reason, these innovations and improvements cannot be incorporated into the system at Landover within a reasonable time period, FSIS is also exploring alternative means of providing these services. We are committed to improving our Field Supply System, and appreciate your patience as we go through some of the pains of growth it is taking to get from here to there.

VEHICLES

Why the Different Mileage Reimbursement Rates?
by Pete Bridgeman
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4222

We received, and responded to, the following question regarding mileage reimbursement rates. It sounded like others may wonder about the same thing, so we include it here for any who may wonder about this:

Q: *Why are there different reimbursement rates for high and low mileage drivers? It is my opinion that they should be the same. Is the thinking, the more you drive, the cheaper it gets to operate your vehicle? If so, I strongly disagree and in fact the reverse may be true. Take into account maintenance and especially depreciation, I say the rate for High Mileage Drivers should be the same, if not higher, then for Low Mileage Drivers.*

I've discussed the subject with other Agency personnel and they basically shrug their shoulders. I was wondering what the official reasoning is.

A: It's a good and legitimate question. While you might not like the answer, I hope I can at least explain the regulation to you, and shed a little light on the reasoning behind it.

First, I'll outline the regulation itself. We are required, in accordance with federal travel regulations found at 41 CFR 301-10, to authorize an official government vehicle for any

employee who is required to drive on official duty on a regular basis, when the cost of operating the government vehicle will be more economical to the government than the cost to reimburse the employee for official miles driven. Departmental Regulations establish a high mileage threshold at the break-even point, which is currently 800 miles per month average miles driven. Below this threshold, it is more advantageous to the government to reimburse drivers for miles driven, and they are entitled to the full reimbursable rate, which is currently 31 cents per mile, for any official miles driven.

In accordance with the 41 CFR 301-10.310(a), for any employee who is authorized to drive a government vehicle but chooses to drive a Privately Owned Vehicle (POV) instead, "reimbursement will be limited to the cost that would be incurred for use of a Government automobile, which in CONUS is 23.5 cents per mile." We refer to this as the high mileage rate. 41 CFR 301-10.310(b) goes on to state that "when you are committed to use a government vehicle...you will be reimbursed 10.5 cents per mile..." if you choose to use your POV instead.

When we go out with the High Mileage Notice each year, establishing the high mileage threshold and requiring all high mileage drivers to commit to either driving a GSA vehicle or their POV, we request vehicles for those who commit to drive a government vehicle (unless they already have one). All high mileage drivers are authorized to drive a government vehicle. If they commit to drive their POV, we are only authorized to reimburse them at the 23.5 cent per mile rate, the approximate cost of operating a government vehicle (that cost actually goes down the more miles a driver drives). If they commit to drive a GSA vehicle and it is not available by the time the fiscal year starts, they can continue to claim the 31 cents per mile until the vehicle is available. If they commit to drive a GSA vehicle and then turn it down, or occasionally choose to drive their own vehicle for convenience purposes, they can only claim 10.5 cents per mile for POV reimbursement.

We strongly encourage our drivers to take the GSA car. Our average high mileage driver, agency-wide, drives about 1800 miles a month. In a year, this average driver costs the agency $5,076.00 to reimburse, even at the lower high mileage rate of 23.5 cents. The same driver driving a GSA car will only cost the government $4,068.00. That's $1,008.00 per driver, and we have approximately 1100 high mileage POV drivers, so, even at the high mileage rate, we are spending $1,100,800.00 more to reimburse POV drivers than we would spend if they drove GSA cars.

The reasoning behind the different mileage reimbursement rates is this. When a government car is authorized, you make the choice, for personal convenience or preference, to drive your own vehicle instead. The government would prefer that you drove the official vehicle authorized, it is more advantageous to the government (and taxpayers) for you to drive the government car. However, they will accommodate your desire to drive your own car, but not at the full reimbursement rate. Even though this accommodation costs this agency over $1 million a year, we can't, nor do we want to, force drivers to drive a GSA car. But, we would prefer it.

So, if you don't think the rates are fair, your only recourse is to accept the government vehicle offered. We encourage it. You do this by committing to drive a GSA vehicle when you submit your high mileage commitment.

ISSUANCES

Recent Agency Issuances
by Corinne Calhoun
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4233

The following notices have been issued since the December 1999 edition of the *Beacon*. Many recent issuances are available in an electronic format from the "PCDIALS" library in Opendesk and from the "Agency Issuances" public folder in the Exchange mail system (Outlook).

Notice 41-99 (11/18/99)
Nominations for USDA's Honor Awards-Year 2000

Notice 42-99 (11/24/99)
Workplace Violence Policy Statement

Notice 43-99 (11/30/99)
Charging Leave During Hazardous Weather

Notice 44-99 (12/8/99)
Social Security and Medicare Hospital Insurance Tax

Notice 45-99 (12/15/99)
Residue Testing Program

Notice 46-99 (12/15/99)
Documentation of HACCP 02 Procedure

Directive 2532.1 (12/2/99)
Security Procedures

Directives and notices are distributed automatically to applicable Agency employees and offices. Additional copies are available from:

USDA FSIS ASD P&DS
MAILDROP 5241
5601 SUNNYSIDE AVENUE
BELTSVILLE MD 20705-5241

Tel: 301-504-4242
Fax: 301-504-4277

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OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

2000 Multi-District Safety Poster Contest
by Harry Thompson
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 214-767-9124 ext 896

The Multi-District Safety and Health Committee (Dallas, Lawrence, and Springdale Districts) announces the year 2000 Safety poster Contest and should focus on ideas for promoting a safe work environment.

Safety Poster Contest Procedures:

Entries are to be in black and white, completely hand-drawn, and on 8 ½ x 11 inch plain paper. Entrants must be permanent full-time employees of the Dallas, Springdale, and Lawrence Districts, Field Operations, FSIS. Entries are limited to one submittal per employee and must be received at the address listed below by close of business March 31, 2000. The employee's Name, District, and Circuit should appear on the back of the poster.

Send your poster to:
Harry Thompson, Safety and Health Specialist
USDA FSIS ASD EHSB
1100 Commerce St., Rm. 5F41
Dallas, Texas 75242

The Multi-District Safety and Health Committee will select one winning poster from each district. Each winner must be on the roles at the time selections are made and will be presented with an eight hour time-off award and certificate. A copy of their poster will be featured in a later edition of the *Beacon*.

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Congratulation, Jo!
by Pete Bridgeman
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4222

Jo Patterson, the Section Head of the Real Property and Facilities Management Section of the Procurement and Property Branch for the past 2 1/2 years, has accepted a promotion to a position with the USDA Office of Operation's Real Property Division, effective December 20, 1999. Jo oversaw and/or coordinated most of the moves of offices, both in headquarters and out in the field that resulted from the Agency's reorganization.

Terry Reid and Teresa Major will alternate as Acting Section Head until we are able to fill the vacant Section Head position. Terry's number is 301-504-3997, and Teresa can be reached at 202-720-9613.

To comment on this newsletter or to submit an article for publication, please contact:
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The current and past editions of *The Beacon* are available electronically on the FSIS OpenDesk and Exchange mail systems as well as on the FSIS Website at: www.fsis.usda.gov/om/adserv.htm

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ATTACHMENT 1

KEY WORK GROUPS/INITIATIVES
WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE/FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM OF THE FUTURE

Work Group or Initiative	Objective/Focus	Leader(s)/FSIS contact
	Meshing strategic planning and budgeting processes	
FSIS Strategic Planning and Budget Formulation 2001-2006	Coordinate a process to mesh strategic planning and budgetary priorities at the Agency level.	Charles Danner, OM & Ray Bolyard, OM
President's Council on Food Safety Strategic Planning Task Force	Develop a comprehensive, national strategic plan for food safety, and develop a unified food safety budget.	Robert Tynan contact C. Woteki lead for strategic plan; C. Wilcox lead for unified budget
National Food Safety System Project	Focus is more effective implementation of existing federal programs. Method: Garner informed ideas from State and local officials as part of collaborative process on how federal, state and local government food safety agencies could work more effectively together.	Ralph Stafko, OPPDE
Inventory of Interactions with States	Develop an inventory of current interactions and responsibilities; identify measures that could possibly improve the effectiveness of these interactions. (Completed 1999.)	Marlin Waller, Evelyn McGovern, OM
	Defining the jobs of the future for the food safety system of the future	
HACCP-Based Inspection Models Project	Part 1: Develop & test new inspection models in up to 25 volunteer slaughter plants to determine if new inspection procedures, together with more extensive plant HACCP & process control systems, can improve food safety and increase consumer protection. Part 2: Develop and test new inspection models for in-distribution, on a parallel track in locations near the first group of participating plants.	Pat Stolfa, Mike Grasso, OPPDE
Consumer Safety Inspector	Introduce the technical consumer safety inspector (CSI, GS-1862) into the FSIS workforce. (Began 1999.)	Louise Fox, OM
Consumer Safety Officer	Introduce the professional consumer safety officer/food safety officer (CSO, GS-696) into the FSIS workforce (On hold while more cost-effective implementation options are identified.)	Bill Smith, OFO and Yvonne Davis, OM; John Korona, OFO (Project Manager)
FSIS Veterinarian of the Future	Define the future roles of veterinarians in FSIS, particularly with the implementation of HACCP systems and pathogen reduction requirements for meat and poultry. (See "Ron's Corner," this issue.)	Ron Hicks, OM Dale Boyle, NAFV (co-chairs)
Future Roles/ Responsibilities of FSIS Compliance Officers	Define the future roles, responsibilities and reporting of FSIS compliance officers so that they apply enforcement authorities to promote industry accountability for food safety.	Carol Seymour, FO Chair

ATTACHMENT 1 (Con't)

Identifying and applying lessons learned		
Farm-to-Table Resource Management Tool	Develop a data-based headquarters tool to facilitate improved, risk-based short- and long-term decision-making and planning.	Cynthia Williams, OPPDE
Work Assignment System Task Group	Design an improved work assignment system.	Richard Beck, OFO; Chair
An employer of choice: Retaining and hiring a diverse workforce		
FSIS Diversity Initiative	Optimize performance of the Agency's mission by ensuring access to the best employees available through the hiring, promotion, training, and recognition of a diverse workforce.	Cynthia Mercado, OA;& Sheila Clemons, OM Co-chairs
Training and Education 2001 & Beyond (TEC-2001)	Examine current education & training activities in FSIS, conduct an assessment of Agency needs, develop an education vision for the Agency, and develop a strategy for delivery of education and training for the 21st century.	Peggy Nunnery, OM Chair
Use of Special Hiring Authorities to Increase Available Scientific Expertise	Develop, obtain approvals for and implement a post-doctoral fellowship program to increase available scientific and public health expertise.	Rhonda Carr and Laurie Lindsay, OM
Innovative Recruitment Strategies	Develop and implement an Agency-wide recruitment plan to reach additional and more diverse applicant pools for FSIS positions. Select and train a cadre of recruiters.	Brenda Fisher, OM

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ATTACHMENT 2
C, F, and G Fund Monthly Returns
December 9, 1999

Months	C Fund	Barclays Equity Index Fund	F Fund*	Barclays U.S. Debt Index Fund	G Fund
1989 (Jan-Dec)	31.03	31.61	13.89	14.45	8.81
1990 (Jan-Dec)	*(3.15)*	*(3.19)*	8.00	8.89	8.90
1991 (Jan-Dec)	30.77	30.42	15.75	16.03	8.15
1992 (Jan-Dec)	7.70	7.61	7.20	7.37	7.23
1993 (Jan-Dec)	10.13	10.10	9.52	9.74	6.14
1994 (Jan-Dec)	1.33	1.32	*(2.96)*	*(2.94)*	7.22
1995 (Jan-Dec)	37.41	37.62	18.31	18.49	7.03
1996 (Jan-Dec)	22.85	22.98	3.66	3.73	6.76
1997 (Jan-Dec)	33.17	33.36	9.60	9.65	6.77
1998 (Jan-Dec)	28.44	28.58	8.70	8.69	5.74
1998					
December	5.76	5.76	0.30	0.30	0.43
1999					
January	4.19	4.18	0.71	0.71	0.42
February	*(3.09)*	*(3.11)*	*(1.74)*	*(1.75)*	0.38
March	3.99	4.00	0.54	0.55	0.47
April	3.86	3.87	0.29	0.32	0.46
May	*(2.36)*	*(2.36)*	*(0.89)*	*(0.88)*	0.47
June	5.54	5.55	*(0.33)*	*(0.32)*	0.49
July	*(3.14)*	*(3.12)*	*(0.43)*	*(0.42)*	0.52
August	*(0.50)*	*(0.50)*	*(0.05)*	*(0.05)*	0.53
September	*(2.78)*	*(2.74)*	1.15	1.16	0.51
October	6.34	6.33	0.38	0.37	0.53
November	2.00		(0.01)		0.51
	20.79		(0.10)		5.88

Figures in parentheses ( ) are negative. All figures given are percentages.

* Through 1990 the F Fund was invested in the Barclays Bond Index Fund.
The C Fund is invested in the Barclays Equity Index Fund which tracks the S&P 500 stock index. The F Fund is invested in the Barclays U.S. Debt Index Fund which tracks the Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate bond index. The G Fund is invested in special issues of U.S. Treasury securities.
The monthly C, F, and G Fund returns represent net earnings for the month, after deduction of accrued administrative expenses. The C and F Fund returns also reflect the deduction of trading costs and accrued investment management fees.
The C, F, and G Fund monthly returns are dollar-weighted: they reflect net earnings on the changing balances invested during the month.
**** The C, F, and G Fund returns for the last twelve months assume, except for the crediting of earnings, unchanging balances (time-weighting) from month to month and assume earnings are compounded on a monthly basis.**
The C and F Fund returns vary from the index returns because of C and F Fund expenses, changing balances in the C and F Funds, and differences in returns between the Barclays funds and the underlying indexes. The index returns are time-weighted: they assume constant dollar balances invested during each month and throughout the period.
Future performance of the three funds will vary and may be significantly different from the returns shown above. See the "Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan" for detailed information about the funds and their investment risks.