Luke: Welcome and thank you for joining Woman's History Month observance. Before we begin, please ensure you have opened the WebEx chat panel by using the associated icon located on the bottom right corner of your WebEx screen. Please note, that all audio connections are muted until the Q&A portion of the call. You may submit written questions, and these will be addressed during the Q&A.

To submit a written question, please select, All Panelists from the dropdown menu in the chat panel, add your question the message box provided and send. If you require technical assistance, please send a chat to the event producer. With that, I will turn the conference over to deputy administrator, Terri Nintemann. Terri, please go ahead.

Terri N.: Great. Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Terri Nintemann, deputy administrator for FSIS. I'm so proud to be here today to welcome you all to the FSIS Women's History Month program. Women's History Month holds great significance to all of us, not only in our personal lives, but also here in the workplace. At FSIS, we celebrate Women's History Month by recognizing the many contributions women have made and continue to make to our food safety mission. This year’s theme of Women's History Month is women providing healing and promoting hope. What a great theme to celebrate women.

Women make up nearly half of the FSIS workforce, including filling vital in-plant positions. In fact, women occupy 51% of food inspector positions, 43% of consumer safety inspector positions, and 50% of public health veterinarian positions. Throughout the pandemic, these women continued, without fail, their mission critical work to protect public health. Despite the many challenges and changes to our normal routines the past two years have brought, families throughout the nation can be reassured by the knowledge that their food is safe.

We’ve seen how women in FSIS are passionate and driven by the agency's public health mission. They know that their work is important, and that people rely on them to keep food safe. This passion, drive and commitment to our mission may be why so many women in FSIS grow into positions of leadership. In fact, women hold half of the leadership positions within the agency and lead seven of the 11 program offices. That's impressive. So today, and every day, we salute all of the women who continue to contribute to our mission of protecting public health. I’m excited to see what the future holds for women who are FSIS.

For today's program, I am joined by a panel of amazing women who represent different areas of the agency. On this panel, we have veterinarians, a physician, top agency leaders and critical frontline workers. These trailblazing women bring a wealth of knowledge about food safety and public health, and they all have unique stories to share about how they came into their current roles at FSIS. In our discussion today, our panelists will answer questions about what motivated them to become a leader in public health, their thoughts of what
makes a great leader, how they maintain work-life balance, and their advice to the next generation of women in leadership roles.

Our audience will also be able to ask questions of the panelists. I know that this panel discussion will be informative, thought-provoking and valuable to the audience. I would now like to introduce Ms. Jodi Hallstrom, alternative dispute resolution specialist and conflict coach with the civil rights staff, who will be our moderator for our panel discussion. Jodi?

Jodi Hallstrom: Thanks so much, Terri. We do have a panel of amazing women, indeed, and I have the distinct honor, and I'm so excited to introduce our panelists to you today. They come from a variety of occupations, as Terri said, backgrounds and areas of expertise. And I can speak... knowledge that all of these are truly amazing, amazing women. So, I'm excited to get started. So first, we have Dr. Kis Robertson Hale, deputy assistant administrator for the Office of Public Health Science.

Next, we have Dawn Sprouls, Dr. Dawn Sprouls, Des Moines district manager in the Office of Field Operations. We also have lieutenant commander, Elizabeth van Dyne. Dr. van Dyne is the public health officer in the Office of Management. Next, we have Ms. Sherri Johnson, executive associate for regulatory operations in the Office of Field Operations. And last, but certainly not least, we have Ms. Christine Guerrisi, a consumer safety inspector, from the Philadelphia district, in the Office of Field Operations.

So, before we get into specific questions, we wanted to get a sense of all of the panelists and what it is that energizes each of the panelists about the work they do. So, we'll start with Kis, and if you wouldn't mind turning on your camera, we'll start with you. Kis, tell us what energizes you about your work.

Kis Hale: Hi. It's great to be here. It's a question. I think, like probably most people, when I'm at work and I feel as though I'm creating something that's useful to others, that I'm doing something that serves a need, a true need, and making, essentially, the world a better place, that really just, that's the stuff that brings me to work every day and not the paycheck or anything else. Really, it is about the internal rewards that comes with doing work that you believe in and serving a great cause. And I think with food safety, you have to look really hard to find a better cause than that, because food is so important to our lives and trying to keep people from getting sick and losing confidence in the food that they eat. It's a good mission So, I'm motivated just by that.

Jodi Hallstrom: Indeed. Thank you so much, Kis. Elizabeth let's go to you next. What energizes you about the current position you're in?

Elizabeth V.: Well, it's great also to be here today, so thank you for having me. I'm the public health officer, so I work on occupational health needs for the agency. And some of the things that really energize me are just public health in general. I really
believe in public health and keeping people safe. And as far as that goes, some of the other things that energize me is I really enjoy working in a team atmosphere, so collaborating with others and then problem solving as well. Thanks.

Jodi Hallstrom: That's great. Thank you, Elizabeth. Dawn, how about you? What energizes you?

Dawn Sprouls: Well, there's three things. One is my family, and I think being able to use the experiences I've had in the agency to educate them and make sure that they understand the importance of food safety and public health. My FSIS team, the district team, the field staff that I work with, I'm watching them every day and the commitment that they have to the work that they do, the dedication that they have, and the commitment to making a difference every single day that they're out there. And then, of course, the American public. I think we are energized by the questions they ask, that they're interested in what we do and how we do it, and we're able to explain that to them, and I think be able to educate them as well.

I've been on airplanes where I get questions about, "Well, what do you do?" And "Oh, that's very interesting." And then, I get questions about "Why is our broccoli contaminated?" And I have to explain to them that I don't regulate broccoli. But it's things like that I think help us know that every day we're doing our job, we're making a difference. Not only in our family, the team that we have, but also the American public, and that they look for that mark of inspection on the products that they buy. And that just gives them a lot of confidence with the teams that we have out there.

Jodi Hallstrom: Absolutely. And you said dedication, Dawn. I couldn't agree more. We have so many dedicated employees, including yourself. So, Sherri, let's go to you next. What energizes you about the work you do?

Sherri Johnson: Well, I want to echo what the other panelists have already said. Thank you so much for having me. It's such a privilege to be able to address our audience and to discuss some of these really important issues involving women's history. I would say what energizes me is very similar to what Dawn said. So, I have a family of five sons, the youngest is two years old, and I joke that we have the highest per-capita meat consumption in the nation.

Jodi Hallstrom: Love it.

Sherri Johnson: But honestly, having the confidence that the food that I serve to my family is safe for them is the primary driver for me. And then, knowing and seeing firsthand the dedication that our inspectors and our employees in this agency have to ensuring that the agency's mission is achieved, it just humbles me every day. And so those are the things that really drives me in this job, and I'm so, so grateful for the opportunity, and I appreciate it. But again, my primary driver is I want to be able to ensure that what I'm serving to my family, and I'm a cook, I'm
the cook in my family, is really safe for their consumption, because that’s the most important thing to me, as it is for most consumers.

Jodi Hallstrom: Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you, Sherri. And last, but not least, Christine, how about you? What energizes you about the work you do as a CSI?

Christine G.: Hi and thank you. What energizes me is the product is brought in directly into my establishments where I am the inspector. So, the product is being wrapped, packaged, labeled, dated, and it's going directly to the consumer. So that is what gets me work every day, knowing that my family, my friends, my grandchildren are safe and receiving a wholesome product that they're picking off the shelves every day in the store.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah.

Christine G.: Thank you.

Jodi Hallstrom: Absolutely.

Christine G.: Yeah.

Jodi Hallstrom: Thank you, Christine.

Christine G.: Thank you.

Jodi Hallstrom: So, we're going to get into the panelist questions and, first of all, thank you so much for your insightful responses, ladies. Now we have a variety of questions for our panelists. And this first question, we're going to send it back to you, Kis, and the question is, what, or perhaps who, motivated you to become a leader? Tell us a little bit about that.

Kis Hale: So, I think early on in life, I realized through trial and error that I enjoyed leading people and I don't know if it's because just of my personality or what have you, but I found that it was, it's just very rewarding when I was able to be able to have a vision, something, and be able to influence people to get behind that vision and make them care about coming up with a skit for the Christmas show or whatever, and everything coming together and it being a success.

Being able to play that role that it's actually behind the scenes, but you're, you're shaping things, you're guiding people and getting them excited about something. I learned early in life that I like that. And so, that's been something that's guided me through my career, and I've taken opportunities where I've been able to get more and more experience in leading people and it suits me. I feel like it's just a great thing to, a great role to play in the organization as a leader.

Jodi Hallstrom: Sounds like you're a natural-born leader, Kis.
Kis Hale: I... That's an interesting point, because I thought early on that, yeah, this is an innate thing, but I do think you can learn how to be an effective leader just by observing people, learning from others, reading about different strategies and techniques. It's a skill just like anything else. So, while you may start out with some natural talent, I think it is something that you can develop over time if you're interested in it.

Jodi Hallstrom: Thank you so much, that's a great insight. I love that. So next we're going to check in with a couple of our panelists who work in the field in one way or another. As we all know, the COVID 19 pandemic has turned our world upside down. It's changed many things in our world, including what we prioritize. And so, we're going to start with you, Christine, just wanting to know, Christine, have any of your personal or professional priorities changed since the pandemic, and, if so, how?

Christine G.: They have. I take your time and care for everyone in my life right now, a lot more than what I have done before. I value my daily task and with my hobbies that I do. I've also have been spending a lot more time with hobbies, because we can't go anywhere right now. So, I've been making mask for people. I started out doing that. Then I started crocheting for a lot of children. Now, I'm learning to play the piano. I found an interesting app called Simply Piano, and I'm teaching myself out to play piano. So yes.

Jodi Hallstrom: That is awesome. I love that. Thank you so much, Christine. I know, it seems as though the great pause has given so many of us an opportunity to do something that we, maybe, thought, "Well, someday, maybe after I retire," or something like that. And so, I love that. Good luck with your learning piano.

Christine G.: Thank you so much.

Jodi Hallstrom: So, [crosstalk00:15:51] ... Yeah. So, we're going to go to Elizabeth. Also, you are in a very different capacity, but you're also in the field, both in your current capacity, as well as prior to joining FSIS. So, what would you say that what priorities have changed in your personal or professional life since the pandemic?

Elizabeth V.: So, I'll talk a little bit about professionally things that have changed since the pandemic. So, in March, when everything started a couple years ago, my supervisor asked me to cover our COVID clinic. And, at that time, we didn't have the testing capabilities that we had now. We had shortages of PPE. And actually, at that time, our clinic was outside because we didn't even have a space to care for patients. And so, things have dramatically changed over those past two years. But from that experience, I started to gain insight into infection control principles and safety principles, and from starting and working in the COVID-19 clinic, at the clinic I was at, I went on to take on leadership roles.

So, my supervisor really believed in me and what I was doing, and so, she put me in roles of overseeing our infection control team for COVID-19, which
oversees all of our PPE and anything else with testing algorithms and things like that. I went on to join our safety committee, and then after that, went on to be the clinical director, interim, for three clinics and a hospital during COVID-19. So, I really learned a lot about leadership skills, and I’m really grateful for my supervisor for believing in me to take on those tasks during COVID-19.

But also, during that time, I realized that I really loved safety and working on safety, working on employee health, occupational health, and infection prevention. And so, that is the career trajectory that led me here today, is now I do occupational health and I really love it. And I’m just grateful for all the teams that I’ve gone to work with during COVID-19. So, thank you.

Jodi Hallstrom: Wow. Wow. Thank you so much, Elizabeth. We’re glad to have you on board. So, thank you to both of you, Christine and Elizabeth. Our next question is for Dawn. Dawn, given all of your responsibilities, both at work and at home, and I know you’ve been in the Des Moines district for a lot of years, and you’ve been leading the charge for a lot of years. What are some ways that you take care of yourself and avoid burnout?

Dawn Sprouls: That’s a good question, and sometimes you can’t avoid it. But what I do is, is I rely on being able to go and see my granddaughters and my granddaughter and my grandkids, and being able to go and do walks, I think read books, and sometimes just take a break from the day to day things, put the phone away and do other activities that sometimes aren’t related to work. And I think that’s so important, not only for myself, but even my team, I tell them that you need to take a break, you need to make sure you take care of yourself. Because if you can’t be there and take care of yourself, you can’t be there for work, and you also can’t be there for your family. And we wouldn’t need to work if we didn’t have our family, so that is so important that I think folks need to realize. And I think, as Christine said, about the pandemic, it’s something you realize you can’t take anything for granted anymore. We have to appreciate and, I think, have gratitude for all the things that we are able to do now and have.

Jodi Hallstrom: That’s great, Dawn, and I love that, because so many leaders want their employees to go ahead and take a break and take time off, but they don’t do so themselves, and so, I really appreciate that insight. And actually, I’d love to open this up to all the panelists, because I think this is something that’s really, really important, even before the pandemic but even more so now, we’re always being asked to do more with less. We all have a lot of responsibilities, and so, maybe we’ll start with Sherri. Do you have any insight as far as what do you do to take care of yourself and avoid burnout?

Sherri Johnson: Actually, Jodi, that’s a great question. And one of the things that I’ve learned, not just during the pandemic, but being a leader with a lot of responsibility, you have yourself to take time for yourself. I think as women, whether we have a family or we have our extended family, our spouses, our parents, our siblings,
we often focus on that versus us. So, I know, for me, my home office is a meditation area. So, I meditate. I also try to find things that, aside from my everyday life, are something that I enjoy.

I’m taking a self-directed, Italian language course. Why Italian? Why not? Seems interesting to me. It’s very fun. And that’s something that I spend my time with. My free time is, how I allocate that is very deliberate, focusing on things that do not include work. My husband and I have a thing where, once you get home, you don’t focus on work. We talk about family, we have dinner together, we joke about what happened today or yesterday or what have you. But also, the most important thing for me is self-care.

So, during the pandemic, I learned to do my own facials and my own nails and my own hair and things that still made me feel like I was getting that pampering, but I didn't have to go out and get that. So, for me, just a fraction of that time, dedicating it to me, just me, is what has allowed me not to be burned out. Now, I will say my personal meditation space is a magnet for the family. I can't keep people out of my office because it smells nice, it has good energy, and they recognize this is a wonderful place to be. Right?

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah.

Sherri Johnson: But I do focus on having some time for myself. As Dawn said before, it's a little challenging, because we tend to focus on the people that work with us and our families, but I do try to take a fraction of that time just to focus on me, even if it's just a little bit of something that makes me feel a little bit more grounded. And so, that's what I do. And meditation and self-care is where I focus that time when I can.

Jodi Hallstrom: Thank you, Sherri. That is so very important, and even just little things, just taking a half an hour to do a meditation or to take a bath, or something like that, can really be very renewing. And a lot of times we talk about doing it and we don't prioritize it, so I love hearing that. How about you, Christine? What do you do to avoid burnout and take care of yourself? Oh, I can't hear you.

Christine G.: Oh.

Jodi Hallstrom: Okay.

Christine G.: Can you hear me now?

Jodi Hallstrom: Yes.

Christine G.: Honestly, this year, I started another huge garden, a lot bigger than what I've done in the previous years, hoping to give lots of vegetables out. I have a few fruit trees and I love to be barefoot. I love to be barefoot out in the grass and the dirt. That just grounds me, absolutely grounds me. So, I do that, I do
walking. And like I said before, I love to play the piano. I love music. So, that's about what I do. Baths are very good. I have some salt rocks and some crystals.

Jodi Hallstrom: What was that? I missed that. And I want to know, you have what?

Christine G.: Crystals and salt rocks that you plug in, and it purifies the air. Yeah, that stuff's good. I like-

Jodi Hallstrom: That's great.

Christine G.: ... the lavender and the lemon for the bath, that's very relaxing. Lavender and some peppermint, sprinkling that around the house. Yeah.

Jodi Hallstrom: That's great. Whatever for each of us is, it might work for one person, but not the next. But whatever works for you, and it sounds like you've really found ways that soothe your soul.

Christine G.: We need to do that.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah.

Christine G.: Yeah.

Jodi Hallstrom: I don't suppose you're actually at the beach right now, although, I do see it.

Christine G.: I'm not, it's the background-

Jodi Hallstrom: Luxurious.

Christine G.: ... prop. Yeah-

Jodi Hallstrom: I love it.

Christine G.: ... that's the background-

Jodi Hallstrom: I love it. Thanks, Christine.

Christine G.: Thank you.

Jodi Hallstrom: Kis, how about you? What do you do to avoid burnout and how do you take care of yourself?

Kis Hale: I don't want to be redundant, because the others said a lot of, they hit on a lot of good tips for unwinding. But one thing that I try to do is establish good mental habits. So just being, just practicing gratitude I think is helpful, and that keeps me grounded, and is a great way to step back and see the big picture. I might be frustrated, I might be tired, but I have a house, I have food to eat, I
have a family. I have so many good things and being able to refocus my attention on what's working well, rather than the problems. I think that helps a lot, prevent the burnout from occurring in the first place.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah, absolutely. Perspective is everything. Right, right?

Kis Hale: Right.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah. Thank you, I love that. Terri. I would love to hear from you as one of our leaders at the helm, what do you do to take care of yourself and avoid getting burned out?

Terri N.: Yeah, that's a great question. So, one of the things I've been doing throughout the pandemic is really making time to walk every day. So, I walk half an hour. A lot of times my son will go with me. He's doing college from here, so that's been nice, too, to have that extra connection. And then, another thing that I've done is my sisters and niece and daughter and nephew's fiancé, we've done a book club.

So, we meet every week online, choose a book, discuss it, talk a lot, just to... So, that's been nice to stay connected. So walking, for me for exercise, staying connected that way with women in my family, and then, also, stay in touch with college friends. One of them's actually in Australia, but we try to do a Zoom call every few months or so just to catch up. So, staying connected to others, and then having that time just to get in a little activity or things that have helped me the past couple of years.

Jodi Hallstrom: That's great. I love that. And so, you walk sometimes with your son. Do you carve out a little bit of time during the work day? Do you do it before work, after work, or does it just depend? Or how do you commit to making sure that happens in your busy schedule?

Terri N.: Evenings. Do it sometime in the evening.

Jodi Hallstrom: Okay.

Terri N.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah. That's great.

Terri N.: Sometimes, I'll be talking to my dad in Minnesota, while I'm walking, checking in with him. Sometimes listen to my son, sometimes listen to a podcast. So, whatever, but yeah, just get out, try to appreciate what's happening in nature along the way. Like right now, I mean, its spring, seeing the new blossoms or needs or whatever's coming out of day also is uplifting.
Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah. It’s so true what they say about we’re not any good for anyone else unless we take care of ourselves. And the whole mask thing in an airplane, put on your own mask first. It’s really true. I think I notice when I’m not taking care of myself, I’m not as good, both at work and at home with family. And so, it’s so important to do for ourselves as well as for others. So, great Terri. Terri, thank you so much. Great, great insights.

So, ladies, the next question is going to be for Sherri, and I think I’m going to open it up to many of you. But Sherri, you had mentioned, and I was aware of this, that you have five, count them, people, five children, five. I have difficulty with one sometimes. So, you have the five boys, how have you balanced? And you spoke to it a little bit with your meditation and that sort of thing. But I remember when I first had my son and I went back to work, I was always feeling like I was disappointing someone. I was either disappointing my family because I was at work, or I was disappointing work because I was with my family. Right?

And there’s that push-pull sort of thing that we have. And so, I’m wondering how do you balance that? And I might even add, integrate. Because work-life balance was the buzzword for a really long time. Now, it’s really, and for a while in the heat of the pandemic, it was really more work-life collision as we were, as we had our kids home with school and we had that sort of thing. And, really, it’s evolving into work-life integration. As I’m sitting here in my dining room, you’re sitting in your meditation room. So, I’m just wondering how do you balance or how do you integrate those competing demands? Do you have any tips for us?

Sherri Johnson: That is a great question. So first I would say your support system is absolutely critical to being able to do that. Especially being a woman in the leadership position, you have to have a strong support system, whether that’s your partner, or your family, extended family and friends. My husband is my primary support system. We really complement one another. But we, also, both have very demanding jobs, and our youngest child is two years old. I returned to work right before the pandemic, so we have that.

The big thing for me, aside from my support system, which, again, is my husband and his family, my family, our friends, structure and routine. I know some people balk at that. I cannot live without structure and routine. I have to know what’s coming next for me, what’s my next meeting? My children are in bed at a certain time. They need routine as well, but I need that time so my husband and I can decompress. "Well, what happened at work today? And how did things go?" I have to have that.

Learning how to relinquish some of that control once the pandemic hit us was an unbelievable experience for me. Because I think a lot of folks, especially women in leadership positions, we’re accustomed to having control, around us and how we do things and understanding that I cannot control everything. But the things that can control, I’ll do my best, giving myself some grace and some room to make mistakes and to change how my schedule works has been a phenomenal learning lesson that I never anticipated before the pandemic.
So, understanding that, "Okay, you know what? We have this going on. We will deal with it. We don't know what's going to happen in two weeks, but let's try to prepare for that." And having children that, I have older son who's in college and that I have a toddler. So, there you have a range of children. And then we have three in between those, where you're trying to make sure that your schedule at home is conducive to their having really productive time with you as parent and productive time with each other, but also knowing that you have to make sure there's structure and make sure that you're prepared for the next day so you can be the best person you can be. If I don't get seven hours of sleep every night, it's a no-go.

I realized during the pandemic, I have to really give myself the rest that I need to be productive the next day, that allows me to give my family the time they need and to really restart and be prepared for the next day, and that's really important to me. I know, like I said, a lot of people balk at structure and routine. I can't live without it, and having to relinquish some control because of the pandemic, not knowing when we would go back to work, not knowing when you could go to the supermarket and not have to stand in line for three hours to get your groceries.

Having to relinquish that and understand, you know what? I can't control everything, but what I can control, I will control to the best of my ability and be the best I can at it. And that's how I've been able to really adjust under those circumstances. It's worked really well for me, surprisingly. Because who would've thought we would be on lockdown in 2020 and not be able to do all the things that we thought, like Kis said, and taking for granted all the things we had done for so long. You learn to adjust.

Jodi Hallstrom: Absolutely. I love that, because structure is, especially when you have so many moving parts, it's really good to have that structure, but also have room for some flexibility, because life happens, right?

Sherri Johnson: [inaudible 00:34:31].

Jodi Hallstrom: Things happen when we least expect it and at, sometimes, the most inconvenient times. And so, to have that structure with a little bit of flexibility is really important. It sounds like you've got a good kind of groove with that.

Sherri Johnson: Yeah.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah, that's great. Thanks Sherri. So Kis, how about you? I believe you're also a parent, and I'm just wondering for you, how do you balance those demands? Because I see your name all over the place in the agency, and you're a very, very busy woman, and you also have a home life. So how do you balance those, that competition or that pull for the two elements of your life?
Kis Hale: So, yeah, so I have two kids, a five-year-old and a three-year-old, both girls. And so, compared to Sherri, I mean, I got it easy because I only got two and she's got five. My hat's off to her, I don't know how she does it. But, I mean, you just find a way, to be honest. I mean, I think a lot of parents probably do relate to that. You have no choice but to figure it out.

And one perspective that I think doesn't get hardly enough attention, but I think we should promote this more is, I think by being a mother, I think it actually has enhanced me as a professional. Because when you're a mother, you really can't afford to not master time management, prioritization, communication skills. You have to be able to learn how to talk to your spouse or your co-parent, your child's babysitter or the teacher, or even the child themselves. You have to be able to discipline them and instruct them in a way that they can understand.

And then, you also develop a reservoir of patience. So, all of those skills translate to your work in the job and can help you be a better leader, a more patient leader, a more supportive supervisor. So, I see... Yes, I mean, parenthood does have demands on your time and on your bandwidth, and it can be a source of stress, but it can also be something that helps you. And to anyone that's a young woman that's considering being a mother, but still, also wants to advance in her career, I would say, go for it. Don't sideline yourself just because you think you have to.

I mean, I was pregnant with my youngest shortly after I started in my role as the deputy assistant administrator for OPHS. And it did take some mental adjustment on my part to feel like I'm not doing anything wrong. It's okay for me to be a mother, be expecting and still be an executive. I didn't see any other women around pregnant in management council. But I just said, "You know what? This is part of life. I'm just going to be the one that's like this."

And I'm very fortunate that I've had supportive supervisors, supportive leaders, that haven't made me feel pressured in any kind of way. They've worked to help me be comfortable. And I think that having a supportive culture around parenthood is, we have to have that in today's world. That's really the only way we're going to be able to succeed as a society is if we do that, we make it okay to be a parent and a working professional.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah. Absolutely. And I so love being able to talk with you panelists and really underscore that you're people, too. You're these icons of our agency, but you're also people with... I mean, look at your background. It's so lovely to even just see a little snapshot of your home and those are so important. And I think I have found, in working with others, as well as with myself, that becoming a parent, mother or father, I think it really helps us consider a perspective other than our own, because now we have a child who's got a different perspective and we get to be more flexible and things like that. And so, I really agree with your assessment that it's helped you in the work world being a parent as well, because it's opened eyes to your way is one way, but there's lots of other ways, and just managing people perhaps, and things like that. I really appreciate that.
Kis Hale: Yeah. And then, and the agency, too. Sherri mentioned it, but, I mean, before I became a parent working at FSIS, I understood food safety is important. Obviously, as a consumer, I have a stake in eating safe food, too, but when you've become a parent and you're serving your kids food, you want to have complete trust in that. You don't want to take any risk, just the thought of them getting sick and being hospitalized with salmonella or... I mean, it's just upsetting. So, you just, like you just said, Jodi, it broadens your perspective and makes it, the work that we do even more real and tangible.

Jodi Hallstrom: Absolutely. Absolutely. Are there any other parents out there on the panel that wanted to weigh in on this and join the conversation about that? Dawn, I know you are a parent and a grandparent. Terri, you mentioned your son, so I know you're a parent. And then, also, Christine, I think you mentioned grandkids. So, does anyone want to chime in, ladies, as far as how do you balance those or how do you integrate the competing demands? Any tips for our listeners?

Terri N.: I'd offer one.

Dawn Sprouls: ... this is-


Dawn Sprouls: Okay. And mine will be quick. I think about as a parent, and I do want to say the agency, kind of echo what Kis said is, the agency has drastically changed over the 28 years that I've been in, and I believe that there is much more understanding of the work-life balance, much more understanding of being able to be a parent and an executive or a leader, or manage and be in some of these positions, that the agency supports.

You get so much more support from not only leadership, but also from the people that you have around you, your teams. It gives you more understanding. And also, like Kis said, I think you have a much better understanding of why it's important for what we do, whether it be for your kids or your grandkids. I think it's so important the things that we do to make sure that that food is safe, and we don't have to worry as they're out in various locations or buying meat and poultry, because we know we have a great system in place.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah. That's great. Thanks, Dawn. Terri, were you going to chime in? Or I heard someone else who was going to weigh in on integrating your work and your life.

Terri N.: So, I was just going to offer, from the other standpoint. So, I've got kids that are one in college, one just out of college. But the other area, which some of us face, too, are aging parents. Right? So that's, then my dad will turn 90 later this year, but there, I just want to say, thanks. I appreciate the fact that like in LA, we support a team and I have support there. This summer, he needed to be
hospitalized and my sisters, who are there for him, needed me to come help, because they're always there for him.

So, I had to just drop everything, but I have, we have a great team that allowed me to drop everything and go take care of something really important for my family. So, I think that's the other aspect, really, that they're integrating all of this. Sometimes everything's not 50/50, but sometimes you just have to go do something. And if you've got a great team that can help you and support you, you can provide that in return someday, I think that's also important.

Jodi Hallstrom: Absolutely. I mean, collaboration is really key, right? And I would also offer that when Sherri talks about her five kids and working with her husband, there's a team there, too, where when work happens, on the flip side, and she has something she needs to do work wise, she can look to her support system and her team to support her that way as well. So that's just great.

And that's a really good point that you make about, it's not just about being a parent, but it's also being the child of an elder parent, who, a lot of our workforce, I preached to this for years and years and when I was managing the EAP and work-life program, that we have over half of our federal workforce, not just FSIS or USDA, but over half are part of the sandwich generation.

So not only are we caring for our kiddos, but if not now, very soon, we're going to be starting to have some responsibilities for our parents. And how do you fit that in with work now? And so, that's really important. And I think another distinction that I am really hearing from all of you talking is that there's really a difference, and maybe sometimes subtle, between what we do and who we are. And that's really important to keep that distinction in mind, because we all have so many different hats we wear and it's different than who we are sometimes.

And so, maybe sometimes they blend, but that's, I think, a really important point that just, it keeps coming to my mind, hearing you all talk. Though, Christine, I would love to open it up to you. I know you said you were a grandparent. You have any final tips on this whole work-life integration for you?

Christine G.: Oh my. Preparedness, prep. Prep ahead of time, that's my little trick that I try to even do that now that my children are up and out of the house. I try to prepare ahead of time on weekends or a Sunday and get ready for the week. It makes it a lot easier if you have things in line and all the wash is caught up, and some foods are prepped ahead of time, so you don't have to run through the door at the end of the day and make a meal. Things are ready ahead of time. We throw things on the grill on a Sunday and eat that for the week instead of cooking large meals every day for people. [inaudible 00:46:15].

Jodi Hallstrom: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Wow, lot of organization. My work-a-round has typically been just not to cook, but I like your idea, too. Food prep is probably a-
Christine G.: But we try that, too, sometimes.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah.

Christine G.: Yeah.

Jodi Hallstrom: Great. So, I'm seeing some things come in the chat. But before we open up the lines for questions as a tribute to Brene Brown and all others who do rapid-fire questions, we're going to do a rapid-fire question for all the panelists. And so, in the spirit of rapid fire, I'll ask the question, and then, I'll call on you all. So, if you all want to turn your cameras on so you're ready to go, and you don't have to, we don't have to speak too much. But just what the question is, is what one piece of advice, what's the most important piece of advice you could give to our next generation of female leaders? Okay? And Terri, we'll start it with you. One piece of advice. Oh, I think you're muted. Hold on. Let's unmute you.

Terri N.: Thank you. Just work with all of your colleagues, collaborate.

Jodi Hallstrom: Collaborate. Yeah. Love it. Okay, thanks. And Kis, how about you? What one piece of advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

Kis Hale: I know it would be the same advice to anyone, don't hold yourself back, don't overthink, don't tell yourself you can't do something. Go for it if you really want to do it. Give it your all.

Jodi Hallstrom: Love it. Okay. Thanks, Kis. Elizabeth, how about you?

Elizabeth V.: So, I would add in that, just to take every experience that you have and learn from it, so there's no lost experience. So, I think, for me, I've gotten to do engineering and I've gotten do, be a pediatrician, be a hematologist-oncologist, do public health. And I really learned that there's not always a straight trajectory, but everything that you do is something that you can build upon and learn from. So, I just really enjoyed all the varied experiences that I've gotten to have.

Jodi Hallstrom: Love it. I find myself often with those, when it's not a straight path, sometimes it helps to ask ourselves, "What is this here to teach me?" Right? And you've had an amazing career. I've read your bio and it's pretty amazing. So, again, we're glad to have you. So, let's got to Christine. How about you? What piece, what one piece of advice would you give to our next generation of female leaders?

Christine G.: Always put yourself first and the rest will fall into place. If you're not happy and healthy, it won't be good for anyone else, the rest of the world. If you're happy and healthy, the rest of the world will fall into your lap.

Jodi Hallstrom: I love that. Always put yourself first. Yeah, that's hard. I mean, how many of us don't do that or say we don't do-
Christine G.: That's very, very hard.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah, yeah. I love that. Thank you, Christine. Dawn, how about you? What one piece of advice... You had mentioned earlier that our agency's changed a lot over the years. And so, now, thinking of our, as all of us ride off into the sunset sometime and retire, and thinking about those young, female leaders, those young veterinarians, what's one piece of advice you would give?

Dawn Sprouls: I have two, so I'm going to be quick. The first one is patience with yourself, because I think you have to be patient as you work through and understand you're going to make mistakes. And also, a piece of advice I got from Judy Riggins many, many years ago, look at every challenge as an opportunity. So those are my two pieces.

Jodi Hallstrom: Love that. Yes, challenges build resiliency and grit, right? If it doesn't kill us. So, Sherri, how about you? What's one piece of advice you'd give to our young generation of people.

Sherri Johnson: I would say it's really along the lines of what Kis and Dawn already said, don't limit yourself to what you think you can or can't do. Allow yourself to break barriers, allow yourself to stand out. Here's one of the things I learned very early on in my career, people are always watching you, and they're always wanting to be inspired and motivated by what you've done and what you're going to do. Never be afraid to be that inspiration and give yourself grace.

You're going to make mistakes, you're going to take different paths, to make course corrections. Allow yourself that flexibility to regroup and redefine what you're going to do. And that's okay. You're not a failure when you do that. Be available or be willing to make changes and have the courage, have the courage to stand out and be a leader. And that's the advice I would give. It's not easy. I think every one of us on here would tell you, it is not easy. That doesn't mean that it's not worth it.

Jodi Hallstrom: That's great. Yeah, it's not easy. That doesn't mean it's not worth it. I love that. That's really, really sound advice. Ladies, thank you so much to all of you for that. I want to turn it over to questions. There's just been so much wisdom. So, let's see what we've got in the chat. So, we're going to open it up, either the line for questions from our participants, and I'm also going to check in the chat, okay? So, let's just look here. Luke, do we have anything on the line? Otherwise, I will go to the chat.

Luke: To ask a question, use the WebEx raise hand icon, or press pound, two, if you're dialed in on audio only. Once again, use the raise hand icon to enter the question queue. At this time, looks like we do have a person on the line.

Jodi Hallstrom: Okay.
Mark: This is a really good conversation. One thing that I’ve always noticed in some offices and this may be a good time to talk about it, is that sometimes there is a difference on way communication is received, especially a difference in men and women sometimes, where sometimes men can be shown as assertive and women maybe saying the same thing, same tone and reflection are shown in a different way. How have you, throughout your career, handled those situations that allowed you to still grow in your career?

Jodi Hallstrom: Okay, does anyone want to take that question? Mark, I love that question.

Sherri Johnson: I want to tell you I’ve learned the most in from communicating with my spouse, who tells me that I receive messages differently than they [inaudible 00:54:14]. So, I learned to listen actively versus what I think someone is saying. And I will tell you early on in my career, I remember having that struggle with, "Well, did they mean this, or did they mean that? And I should respond this way now." And this is, people that work for me will tell you, this is a pro and a con. I hear what you say at face value. What you said is what I’m going to interpret. If that's what you meant, that's what I'm going to interpret. If you meant something different, let me know. But that is a very valid point, because I know in my career, I have found that as well. And I am learning, me personally, Sherri, am learning that I do have to understand the source of the question and understand what is intended behind it. And if I don't understand it, ask the question and be open for whatever the response is. I've learned that. It's been very useful, for me.

Jodi Hallstrom: That's great. Thanks, Sherri. We're getting very close to the top of the hour, but I want to make sure that I identify... I'm just looking through the chat here and there have been a lot of questions around, there's such a focus on mothers and they're not the only leaders and things like that. So, I really want to push that to the panelists. Certainly, no disrespect to our fathers, absolutely not. And, of course, as you can see in our panel, this is a women's history event, so that's why we have the focus here.

But does anyone want to speak to that, in particular? Some questions around, there's an extensive focus on that, but mothers are not the only caretakers out there, mothers are not the only leaders out there. So, anyone? I see a lot of head shakes. Does anyone? Elizabeth, for example, I don't know your parental status, but I do realize I didn't ask you that question. So, I'm not sure if you want to answer it or if someone has some thoughts around this.
Elizabeth V.: Well, I'll start out with just sharing a little bit. I think one of the things is, I think it's so important to honor everyone. And I think something that I learned, I was on deployment last month and we all came from different backgrounds. We had all left our families for 30 days, and a family is a family, no matter how it's defined, whether who's in it, how many people, if it's friends or whatever else. And so, I think when we have these conversations, we're honoring all women today and their leadership. And so, I think when I was on deployment, I was really grateful to hear how everyone's family was different and how we were all able to support each other when we were away from our families back home.

Jodi Hallstrom: Thank you. Anyone else before we turn it over for closing remarks?

Sherri Johnson: Just quickly, Jodi, I want to jump in, because I mirror what the person who asked the question said. My husband and I personally have completely different schedules. So, he has the kids on his days, and I have the kids on my days. And at any given time, one of us is the caretaker. And there are days where the kids are running around with the burlap sack on. That's not my day, but that's how he did it. And I, hey, it worked great for you. You're the caretaker, you know?

And I think we acknowledge that who... And I said earlier, our support system, no matter who that is, has allowed us to be the leaders that we are today. No matter if that's our immediate family, friends, extended family, that allows us to do what we have to do in support of the agency. And I know I'm so grateful. I know all of you are for our support system, no matter who that is.

Jodi Hallstrom: Yeah, that's great. I love that. Well, we're already at almost the top of the hour here. And again, I'd like to thank Terri for hosting this important event, and to the panelists for your time and participating today, and your willingness to just share a bit about yourselves and open your homes to us, if you will. So just thank you so, much. I think we could go on for hours and talk some more. So perhaps we'll do this again. Now I'm going to turn it over to Tisha Lighty-Kane. She is our women's special emphasis program manager for closing remarks. Oh, Tisha, you're muted.

Tisha L.: Okay. Here we go.

Jodi Hallstrom: There we go.

Tisha L.: Hello, everyone. As Jodi mentioned, my name is Tisha Lighty-Kane. I am a consumer safety inspector and the special emphasis program manager for women. I would like to first thank deputy administrator, Terri Nintemann, for her opening remarks and to all of our panel members for their contributions to today's program. I would also like to give a special thanks to all of the employees that were able to join us today. For those who were unable to join today, this event will be recorded and provided at a later date on the CRS website. I hope everyone has a great day. Thanks again.