Speaker 1: Afternoon everyone. I’m Paul Kiecker, the FSIS administrator, and I want to welcome you to this month’s call with the regulated establishments. As a reminder, if you're not affiliated with an FSIS regulated establishment, we ask that you disconnect now. For those remaining on the call, we ask that you be respectful of those on the call and their experiences, and treat these conversations accordingly. As always, please continue to provide us your feedback. We especially want to hear from small and very small establishments, and we’re always looking for ways that we can better support small, very small establishments in meeting FSIS food safety standards, and to keep the lines of communication open, we hope that you share your ideas directly with FSIS leadership on these calls, or if you’re more comfortable with your in plant team, the frontline supervisor, or the district office. You can also email us at fsis@usda.gov.

I’m going start with a reminder that FSIS is hosting its third small plant round table of the year on August 25th in Phoenix, Arizona. As with our other round tables, we will also have a virtual format for those who cannot attend in person. Small and very small establishments in the Alameda district have received an invitation from their frontline supervisor with instructions on how to register and attend the event. We will have another round table in Boise, Idaho on September 16th, and small, and very small establishments in the Denver district can expect an invitation in the very near future. The purpose of these round tables is for small plant owners to share their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions directly with FSIS leadership from our district offices and from Washington, DC. We’ve had a lot of great participation and positive feedback in our previous round tables and I encourage everyone to attend in person or virtually, when a round table is scheduled in your district.

Now I’d like to share with you that on August 1st, FSIS announced that it will be declaring salmonella an adulterant in breaded and stuffed raw chicken products. Products such as chicken Kiev and chicken cordon bleu. These products are typically found in the frozen food aisle of the grocery store. This is a major step forward in our efforts to reduce salmonella illnesses associated with poultry. We will propose that breaded and stuffed raw chicken products will be considered adulterated when they exceed a very low level of salmonella contamination, and would be subject to regulatory action, including recall. FSIS will be proposing to set the limit at one colony forming unit of salmonella per gram for these products, a level that the agency believes will significantly reduce the risk of illness from consuming these products. The agency will also seek comment from the public on whether a different standard for adulteration, such as zero tolerance or one based on specific serotypes would be more appropriate.

We expect to publish a notice in the federal register in the fall, in which FSIS will ask for public comments on the standard, and request suggestions for a final implementation plan, including a verification testing program. Once published, we will post a link to the notice on the FSIS website, so that you can go directly to the federal register to review and comment. We will also make an announcement in the constituent update. When the proposal is finalized, FSIS will announce its final implementation plans and the date it will begin routine testing for salmonella in these products.

The agency is also working on improving its approach to reducing salmonella illness attributed to all poultry products. This October, FSIS plans to release a proposed
framework for a new comprehensive strategy to reduce salmonella in poultry and convene a public meeting to discuss it in November. Our proposal will outline three major strategies to target salmonella at different parts of the slaughter and processing operation. We are proposing to develop enforceable final product standards for all raw poultry products, which we believe is necessary to protect consumers. We’re also looking at modifying our slaughter and processing regulations that ensure establishments are taking steps to reduce salmonella contamination in poultry, throughout slaughter processing operations.

And finally, we are proposing to require salmonella test results for each flock prior to entering the establishment. We will set a target for incoming flocks, that incoming flocks are expected to meet. If the flock exceeds the target, the establishment must demonstrate that its food safety system and interventions can mitigate the elevated salmonella load, and produce safe product. We’re also exploring the idea of requiring establishments to consider, in the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point plan, that salmonella is a hazard reasonably likely to occur in birds at receiving. We’re planning a public meeting for early November, where we hope to hear from stakeholders about this framework. From the start, we have emphasized the importance of collaboration in developing this strategy, and that continues to be a priority. We continue to welcome your thoughts and feedback on our efforts to reduce salmonella illnesses due to poultry products. If you can contact us at anytime by emailing salmonella@usda.gov.

Next, I want to provide you an update on the Meat and Poultry Inspection Readiness Grant program, which is offered by USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service. These grants are awarded to currently operational meat and poultry slaughter and processing facilities, who are seeking to obtain a federal grant of inspection, or seeking to operate as a state inspected facility under a cooperative interstate shipment program in a participating state. The second round of applications for this program ended on May 24th. AMS is finalizing its review with the application and plans to announce the second round of awardees this coming Monday, August 22nd. There will be approximately 100 new awardees from round two, bringing the total of awardees from both rounds up to approximately 275 firms that will be seeking a grant of inspection. You can find more information about this program and the other grant and loan programs offered by USDA, by going to www.sa.gov/meat. Next up, Robert Bane, the assistant administrator for the Office of Investigation Enforcement and Audit, will share with you an update on the Oregon State Inspection Program. Robert?

Speaker 2: [inaudible 00:08:51]. On July 28th, FSIS and the state of Oregon finalized a cooperative agreement under which the state inspection program may inspect meat products produced for shipment within the state. As part of the cooperative agreement, the state inspection program must develop, administer and enforce requirements that are at least equal to those imposed under the Federal Meat Inspection Act. With the addition of Oregon, 28 states now have state inspection programs. In states with inspection programs, establishments have the option to apply for federal or state inspection, but product produced under state inspection is limited to intrastate commerce, unless that state participates in a cooperative interstate shipment program.
FSIS provides up to 50% of the state's operating funds, as well as training and other assistance. The agency also reviews each state Meat and Poultry Inspection Program and its requirements and activities at least annually. You can find more information about this in the July 29th constituent update. Now I’ll turn it over to Michelle Catlin, FSIS's international coordination executive. Dr. Catlin?

Speaker 3: Thank you, Robert. I want to make sure all of you are aware that, starting September 26th, 2022, export certificates for meat and poultry products exported to French Polynesia or Tahiti, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will be generated in FSIS's PHIS system, that is the Public Health Information System. This does exclude casings and egg products at this time. Adding these three countries will bring the total number of countries in PHIS for exports, to 84. All export certificates, or that is the FSIS form 9060-5 series generated through PHIS for these three countries, will be digitally signed and printed by industry personnel with PHIS access. All attestations or other required information for these countries, as are documented in the export library, will be captured in the FSIS form 9060-5 remark section, or in form 9060-5b, which is the continuation sheet. As with past implementation of countries in PHIS, FSIS encourages industry to use the Industry Test Environment, or ITE to test application submittals for export to these three countries.

A level two e-authentication or e-auth is required for all persons that will access PHIS, and that's for both the test environment and the live production environment. The July 29th constituent update has more information on this announcement and on PHIS enrollment. That update also includes links to FSIS's PHIS industry user guide and other helpful information. As a reminder, FSIS inspection personnel will print digitally signed export certificates only upon request when industry does not have a functional printer, or PHIS access. It is expected that this will be rare, as a functioning printer is an expectation for exporting. FSIS notice 22-22, which was published on April 25th, 2022, has more information on these printing procedures. Next, Rachel Edelstein, assistant administrator of our Office of Policy and Program Development, will discuss regulatory updates. Rachel.

Speaker 4: Thank you, Dr. Catlin. I would like to provide you with an update on the line speed waivers at firms operating under the New Poultry Inspection System on NPIS. On July 29th, FSIS announced that it is contracting with third party worker safety experts to conduct a study that measures the impact of increased line speeds on worker safety. This action is in response to a July 28th, 2020 lawsuit by the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, in which the union challenged the issuance of line speed waivers that permitted certain firms under NPIS to operate at line speeds up to 175 birds per minute. Earlier this year, the court granted USDA's motion to remand the matter so that we could reconsider poultry line speed waivers in light of the time limited trials FSIS has implemented for swine establishments, operating under the new swine slaughter inspection system. The study will collect safety data from all establishments operating at line speeds above 140 birds per minute, and will include onsite visits and access to records, and interviews with establishment personnel.

The agency is thus sunsetting all the existing poultry line speed waivers, and establishments that wish to participate in the study, must apply for modified waivers.
that will allow them to operate at line speeds of up to 175 birds per minute. Poultry establishments with existing line speed waivers have received a letter with information about the study and how to apply for the modified waiver. Prior to receiving the modified waiver, the establishment must agree to participate in this study and must agree to provide worker safety data. Establishments have until September 1st, 2022, to let FSIS know whether they consent to participate in the study, and until September 30th, 2022, to submit the initial requested worker safety information. FSIS retains discretion, based on its case by case review, to grant or deny any waiver application on any basis permitted by law.

For establishments that receive modified waivers as study participants, the existing line speed waivers will sunset once all of the applications have been reviewed and modified waivers are ready to be granted. If an establishment refuses to participate in the study, or if its application is denied, then its waiver will be terminated after a 60 day grace period, after the close of the application period, or the notification of denial. The modified poultry line speed waivers will continue at least through the end of the study. We will work closely with the poultry establishments to address any questions they have about the study and the modified waivers. Eligible establishments that are interested in applying can submit their requests through askFSIS, which you can find on the FSIS website. You can find more information about this in the July 29th constituent update.

Next I’d like to inform you that FSIS is hosting a second round of webinars for industry, on the revised 2021 cooking and stabilization guidelines for meat and poultry products, also known as appendices A and B. The webinars will be held on September 19th and September 21. As a reminder, back in December, 2021, we announced that we've updated the guidelines to clarify the requirements, provide new options to achieve legality and stabilization, and to address gaps in the scientific knowledge or newly recognized risks. We held a first round of webinars back in May, in which we reviewed the changes in the updated guidance, and provided information on how you can reassess and update your food safety programs if you’re currently using the older versions of the guidelines as support for your process. You can find the May webinar recordings and the PowerPoint presentation on the FSIS website, by going to the news and events page.

Based on your positive feedback, we decided to hold this second round of webinars for you. Be on the lookout for an announcement on this, including instructions on how to register for the webinars, on our website and in a future constituent update. Please note that establishments that are using the previous version of the appendices have until December 14th, 2022, to either update to the 2021 guidelines, or to identify alternative support. You may contact your frontline supervisor and request an outreach session with an enforcement, investigations and analysis officer, to conduct a non-regulatory review of your current program and support. We urge you to reach out to us with any questions or concerns, ahead of this deadline.

Speaker 1: All right, so with that, I’ll go ahead and close out. I want to say thanks to everyone for taking time out of your day to be on this call. Our next call with the FSIS regulated establishments is going to take place next month. And I want to emphasize that we want to hear your feedback and the topics that you want information on, and any other
ways that we can make these calls more valuable to you and meet your information needs. You can send us a message at fsis@usda.gov, with any feedback that you have on any topic. Again, thank you for your collaboration in providing safe food to consumers worldwide, and for a safe environment for FSIS employees to work. Thank you very much, have a great day.

Speaker 5: That concludes our conference. Thank you for using Event Services. You may now disconnect.