

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, DC

FSIS DIRECTIVE

1240.1
Revision 6

10/18/23

Communicating With External And Internal Entities

CHAPTER I – GENERAL

I. PURPOSE

This directive provides instructions to FSIS personnel and FSIS program areas on communicating with the media, elected officials and their staff, other external stakeholders, and internally with employees. This directive also includes information on visual communication with external audiences, and the intake process for requesting visual information, including graphics and video support. Additionally, this directive provides information on the roles and responsibilities of the various offices within the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education (OPACE). FSIS has rewritten this directive in its entirety to include guidelines for communicating with external and internal entities and to update organizational references.

NOTE: This directive does not address the development and clearance of FSIS Directives and Notices, which is covered in [FSIS Directive 1230.1](#), *FSIS Issuance System*. Similarly, it does not address the development or clearance of policy or guidance documents, which is handled by the Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD).

Key Points

- *Provides instructions on how to refer inquiries from elected officials and their staffs, the media, and other outside entities to the appropriate OPACE staff who are authorized to communicate with these entities;*
- *Describes how FSIS program areas can access OPACE to meet external and internal communication needs, including how to use the visual communications project request intake process; and*
- *Describes how FSIS communicates with the USDA Office of Communications (OC) and Office of Congressional Relations (OCR) and in what capacity.*

II. CANCELLATION

FSIS Directive 1240.1, Revision 5, *Communication with External Entities*, dated 1/26/10.

III. BACKGROUND

A. FSIS fosters external and internal communications that support the Agency's mission to protect public health and ensure food safety. OPACE is responsible for planning and executing communication programs, public meetings, correspondence, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Privacy Act

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic

OPI: OPPD

requests, web content, public engagement, consumer education, product recall notifications, certain internal communications to employees, and using communication strategies that inform and educate a variety of audiences on policies, decisions, public health and safety, foodborne illness prevention, and safe food handling. FSIS is dedicated to maintaining confidence and trust in the Agency's food safety mission by ensuring that information released to outside entities meets guidelines for release, accurately and consistently reflects official Agency policy, and is furnished in an appropriate manner.

CHAPTER II – OPACE STAFF COMMUNICATION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

I. OPACE

FSIS receives inquiries from Members of Congress, State Governors, State legislatures, media outlets, constituents, consumer groups, industry representatives, and the general public regarding food safety issues and policies. OPACE has centralized offices that are responsible for responding to FSIS-related inquiries. These centralized offices ensure all information released is consistent with FSIS and USDA policy. These centralized offices are listed and described in this chapter.

II. Congressional and Public Affairs Staff (CPAS)

- A. CPAS serves as the FSIS contact and spokesperson for the media, stakeholders, constituents, and Congress. CPAS develops communications strategies for Agency initiatives, externally and internally, to ensure consistent food safety and policy messaging.

B. CPAS' responsibilities include:

1. Coordinating with other FSIS offices and responding to media inquiries, in consultation with the USDA OC as appropriate;
2. Working with FSIS subject matter experts (SMEs) to write communications plans to disseminate information on new policy developments and agency initiatives;
3. Coordinating efforts and messaging with the OC and OCR for communications concerning media, social media, and Congress. Additionally, OPACE collaborates with other USDA agencies regarding any other announcements that overlap or may be of interest to FSIS stakeholders;
4. Responding to congressional inquiries, preparing testimony and statements for Agency officials for congressional hearings;
5. Coordinating small plant roundtables with FSIS senior leadership and regulated establishments;
6. Working with SMEs to respond to inquiries from constituents, consumers, and consumer and industry representatives regarding food safety policies received through the FSIS website, phone, and emails, as appropriate;
7. Providing accurate and timely information to stakeholders on Agency policies and initiatives through external agency newsletters to industry and other stakeholders;
8. Collaborating with other agencies, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) public affairs and communications programs

during human illness outbreak investigations;

9. Communicating about recalls concerning FSIS regulated product to the media and the public;
10. Managing FSIS social media platforms, in conjunction with guidance from the USDA OC;
11. Creating and developing visual content to be used externally by FSIS employees, starting with an intake process to determine appropriate communication tools; and
12. Writing speeches and talking points for the FSIS Administrator and Deputy Administrator and USDA's Under Secretary and Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety.

III. Digital and Executive Communications Staff (DECS)

A. DECS conveys the Agency's mission and goals through written communication, stakeholder engagement, and external and internal websites. DECS manages all official correspondence, certain internal communications, and web content for the Agency.

B. DECS' responsibilities include:

1. Drafting and clearing official Agency correspondence and working with Agency personnel to ensure that appropriate information is included with the Agency's responses to incoming correspondence;
2. Coordinating with the Department on document tracking systems and review of official correspondence;
3. Managing internal communication, including *Food for Thought* employee newsletter, employee town halls, and the FSISFeedback@usda.gov mailbox;
4. Coordinating and providing timely information and updates to Agency employees on communication initiatives and information via all-employee user notices;
5. Managing the Agency's public website and intranet; coordinating with the Department to ensure consistent messaging and compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and guidelines for web and digital communications;
6. Coordinating meetings with stakeholders and serving as a liaison to consumer and industry groups;
7. Interpreting, applying, and ensuring compliance with all relevant laws, regulations, and guidelines for web and digital communications, including 508 compliance and accessibility; and
8. Providing editorial review and clearance for Agency publications, reports, presentations, and other materials to ensure they follow the correct styles and formatting.

IV. Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Staff (FOIAS)

A. FOIAS ensures FSIS is transparent to the public, to the extent allowable by law, by providing Agency records, data, and information to the public. Additionally, FOIAS helps ensure that agency records are

kept and maintained in accordance with applicable National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) records schedules.

B. FOIAS' responsibilities include:

1. Administering the FOIA and Privacy Act programs in accordance with [5 U.S.C. § 552](#), amended by [OPEN Government Act of 2007](#) and the [FOIA Improvement Act of 2016](#);
2. Administering the Records Management program by ensuring that program offices are reviewing their records file plans and ensuring their records are maintained and disposed of according to NARA approved records retention schedules;
3. Serving as the liaison with the Department's FOIA, Privacy, and Records Management points of contact;
4. Ensuring that any policy or direction changes concerning records management from the Department and/or NARA are clearly conveyed to the Agency, and that shared information in response to a FOIA or Privacy Act request, or Records Management request is coordinated;
5. Managing a system for ensuring that responses to FOIA and Privacy Act are complete, consistent, timely, and in compliance with public disclosure requirements;
6. Managing and tracking all Privacy Act related breaches and incidents for FSIS in conjunction with the Office of the Chief Information Officer;
7. Managing the disposition and delivery of records to be accessioned to NARA; and
8. Providing training and guidance to FSIS related to FOIA, Privacy and Records Management.

V. Food Safety Education Staff (FSES)

A. FSES communicates food safety messages to educate consumers and operates the Meat and Poultry Hotline and the FoodKeeper mobile application.

B. FSES' responsibilities include:

1. Conducting consumer food safety education communication campaigns, which include elements such as media interviews, press releases, blogs, and social media, to convey information to the public;
2. Maintaining and distributing food safety educational materials, such as brochures, pamphlets, and food thermometers, to consumers, partners, and other health and outreach organizations;
3. Collaborating with FSIS field staff by providing updated food safety talking points and promotional items/publications to assist in food safety outreach in their local communities or for events and exhibits;
4. Conveying food safety information to the public during natural disasters in coordination with Office of Communications;
5. Managing the FoodKeeper mobile application, which provides storage and handling information for

over 650 food and beverage items;

6. Collaborating with other agencies, including CDC and FDA, on consumer food safety education;
7. Conducting consumer research to gather valuable information about consumer food handling behaviors to shape current and future messaging. Shares these findings with consumers and industry partners; and
8. Partnering with organizations, local community groups, to share food safety information to wider audiences.

CHAPTER III – AGENCY COMMUNICATIONS INSTRUCTIONS

I. COMMUNICATING WITH EXTERNAL ENTITIES

A. FSIS designates Official Representatives to speak for the Agency on FSIS matters. An Official Representative is an Agency employee authorized by OPACE to present the official FSIS position on any topic to persons not employed by the Agency. This can occur during speeches, presentations, interviews, conversations, external meetings, by email, on social media, or in writing. OPACE's authorization does not necessarily need to occur each time the Official Representative presents to or meets with individuals not employed by the Agency if the Official Representative frequently presents to those outside the Agency (e.g., Assistant Administrators, subject matter experts on a specific food safety topic). OPACE is to approve any interactions with reporters and Members of Congress or their staff.

B. As a private citizen, an employee may express views about Agency policy and programs, provided that the employee informs the audience that they are not speaking on behalf of FSIS or USDA, but as a private citizen on personal time.

C. The CPAS Director is the Agency Publications Control Officer (APCO). External-facing documents (including publications) are to be submitted through the Department's document management system, to the APCO following program area clearance through supervisory channels, including Assistant Administrators. The APCO ensures compliance with Departmental, Agency, style, and grammar requirements, as well as reviews the look and feel to best reach the intended audience and better serve customers. The APCO also reviews documents through the document management system to ensure consistency with Agency messaging and that appropriate style guidelines are met.

D. Employees and program areas are to:

1. Complete [FSIS Form 1240-2](#), *OPACE Communications Project Request Form*; and
2. Submit all visual design or branding projects (video, graphics, flyers, etc.) that will be used externally and any internal design projects that have the possibility of being sent out externally along with the aforementioned form to designfeedback@usda.gov.

E. CPAS leads coordination with the Office of Management for printing and with OC for photo and design review.

F. Employees are to contact DECS at DECS@usda.gov to provide correspondence or content tracking services or inquire about the document management system. [FSIS Directive 2610.3](#) and the [FSIS Correspondence Manual](#) instruct employees how to prepare and process Agency correspondence and memoranda.

G. Employees are to contact DECS at DECS@usda.gov when updates are requested on the FSIS

webpage, so DECS may provide:

1. Timely updates to Key Agency Contacts and officials' biographies on the FSIS website; and
2. Web content updates that have prior approval by the program area's Assistant Administrator.

H. Employees are to contact FSES at FSE@usda.gov to:

1. Obtain consumer education information and materials, in English and Spanish for outreach activities; and
2. Refer questions from consumers regarding food safety education information, such as social media, the FoodKeeper app, and the Meat and Poultry Hotline.

I. Employees are to contact FOIAS with questions about FOIA and Privacy Act requests or any records management questions at OPACE_FOIAS@usda.gov.

II. COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS AND THEIR STAFFS

A. FSIS receives inquiries from Members of Congress, State Governors, State legislature members and their staff members regarding FSIS policies and initiatives. FSIS has centralized offices, DECS and CPAS, which are responsible for responding to elected officials and their staffs. These centralized offices ensure all information released is consistent with FSIS and USDA policy by consulting SMEs within all relevant program areas.

B. CPAS coordinates with USDA OCR to ensure consistency in responses.

III. COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

A. FSIS has centralized the responsibility of responding to media inquiries within OPACE. This ensures consistency of responses; contact with appropriate agency experts to obtain information; and proper clearance within Agency and Department, as needed, prior to dissemination. OPACE receives inquiries from media officials regarding food safety issues, FSIS policies and initiatives, and food safety education. CPAS is responsible for responding to all food safety issues and FSIS policy and initiative related inquiries. FSES is responsible for responding to media and constituents to provide consumer food safety education information. These centralized offices ensure all information released is consistent with FSIS and USDA policies by consulting subject matter experts within all relevant program areas.

B. CPAS coordinates with the Office of the Administrator, Office of Food Safety, and USDAOC to ensure consistency in responses.

IV. COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER EXTERNAL ENTITIES

FSIS receives inquiries from constituents, consumers, industry and consumer representatives, and other stakeholders regarding food safety policies. CPAS is responsible for coordinating responses, as appropriate, to ensure all information released is consistent with FSIS and USDA policies.

VI. SOCIAL MEDIA

A. OPACE is the communications entity for FSIS, operating all social media channels for the agency. FSIS posts information regarding food safety, recalls, policy updates, and job announcements.

B. Employees can use their own social media channels as private citizens, and they are to be clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the agency.

VII. EXHIBIT BOOTHS AND BANNERS

A. OPACE is responsible for the design and production of all FSIS exhibit booths and banners. CPAS has designed and produced sets of recruitment banners, outreach banners, and full exhibit booths that reflect the Agency's branding. These exhibit booths and banners have been cleared for use by the Agency and OC. OPACE will determine when new exhibit booths and banners need to be produced.

B. Most FSIS program offices, all district offices and all labs have received sets of cleared recruitment and outreach banners for their use. Each program office, district office and laboratory that received the recruitment and outreach banners are responsible for managing the storage and use of their exhibit banners. Each program office, district office and laboratory is responsible for shipping the exhibit banners to and from events and reporting any damaged banners or exhibits to the CPAS Director and Deputy Director to order replacements.

NOTE: All program offices, District Offices, and laboratories are to retire any exhibit booths, banners, and tabletop displays they previously created or used.

C. CPAS manages two full exhibit booths. Employees and program areas are to contact the CPAS Director or Deputy Director at designfeedback@usda.gov to reserve the full exhibit booths one month in advance of the event.

VIII. COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL AUDIENCES

A. It is important that employees recognize that visual communication items are to be evaluated and coordinated, even before development. It is important that each program area carefully considers what information needs to be conveyed, who the intended audience is, and what the dissemination plan is for each project. This planning makes efficient use of valuable Agency resources and ensures awareness of each communication proposal at the beginning of the process. To comply with this, employees and program areas are to complete [FSIS Form 1240-2](#), *OPACE Communications Product and Visual Aids Request Form*, which provides the listing for the visual communication items. Employees are to submit the completed form to designfeedback@usda.gov before the development of each idea. This will allow CPAS to make recommendations for the best communications tool based on topic and intended audience.

B. Communication tools that OPACE employs consist of:

1. An employee newsletter, such as *Food for Thought*, which is an internal, weekly publication sent via email that contains Agency updates;
2. All-Employee User Notices, an email sent Agency-wide to provide notification on internal events or policy developments that require immediate notification and attention;
3. Stakeholder newsletters, such as the *Constituent Update*, a newsletter sent every Friday or on special occasions to provide stakeholders (consumers and industry), FSIS employees, and all other interested parties with updates concerning FSIS' policies and regulations; and the *FSIS Updates for Small Plants*, a newsletter sent the first Wednesday of every month to provide specific information to small plants on FSIS policies and regulations.

4. Social media channels, i.e., X (formerly known as Twitter) LinkedIn, Facebook; and
5. Hill notifications, messaging distributed to Members of Congress to inform them of FSIS policy updates.

IX. QUESTIONS

Refer questions regarding this directive through supervisory channels to OPACE CPAS by telephone at (202) 720-9113 or to the CPAS Director or Deputy Director at designfeedback@usda.gov. Refer to Chapter III. Agency Communications for all other question referrals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rachel A. Edelstein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development