WASHINGTON, June 22, 2000 - *I extend my heartfelt sympathies to the families and friends of the two USDA compliance officers and the California state investigator who were shot yesterday at Santos Linguisa Company, a small sausage processor in San Leandro, California.

*These employees spent their careers protecting the health of American consumers and I am saddened by their deaths. Every day, more than 7,500 FSIS front-line personnel and 1,500 field office and headquarters employees ensure that federal meat and poultry regulations are met. We are all troubled and saddened by this tragedy.

*USDA will be working with local law enforcement officials and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to support a full investigation into this crime and appropriate follow up.

*This morning, I spoke with consumer and meat and poultry industry representatives. I reminded them of our mutual goal of ensuring consumers receive only the safest food possible. I also reminded them that it is time to lower the rhetoric on food safety issues and to find a way to work together to resolve these issues. An atmosphere of mutual respect must be maintained in working toward our common goals.*