

The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

February 2021

Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) met with Consumer Safety Inspector Michael Yamada on Jan. 5 during Kiecker's visit to Establishment M-28, a meat and poultry processing plant located in Cudahy, Wisconsin. During the visit, the two discussed the impact COVID-19 has had on FSIS employees and their families. Photo by Dr. Kelly Mowell, OFO.



Adapting to Challenges: Employee Orientation and Onboarding

By Felicia Thompson, OPACE, and Cecilia Matthews, OEED
Phone: (202) 603-2150 and (202) 708-8160

FSIS is a big proponent of keeping its employees informed — from the most seasoned executive to those who are new to the Agency. For the latter, the transfer of information does not begin on their first day; it begins well before then. Potential applicants can learn about the Agency in job announcements, acquire more information during the interview process and garner more knowledge during orientation and onboarding. A cohesive team of FSIS staff ensures that the Agency's hiring, orientation and onboarding processes run smoothly.

New Hire Orientation

Orientation is a one-time event that welcomes new employees to the Agency. Using their personal computers or government-issued devices, employees interact with each other via video conferencing technology. They also electronically complete tax documents, sign up for benefits and learn general information about the Agency.

Cecilia Matthews, a headquarters facilitator with the Office of Employee Experience and Development (OEED), conducts orientation at least twice a month for all new employees. She says of

the process, "The Agency's new employee orientation is now 100 percent conducted by virtual means and has been well-received. Every person is given the opportunity to complete a survey and share feedback about their experiences. In 2020, 699 people joined the Agency and 87 percent of those who completed the feedback survey expressed their satisfaction with virtual orientation." Matthews continued, "In 2021, our goal is to increase that percentage."

Field Employees' Orientation and Onboarding

Field employees receive their initial orientation from Matthews, which focuses more on the administrative aspects of joining FSIS. A second virtual orientation is conducted with them and their District Office staffs. These meetings give employees an opportunity to obtain specific information about their jobs, including how those jobs impact the Agency.

Once orientation is complete, new team members in the field receive in-person onboarding at their duty stations. Onboarding can last a week or more and allows employees to complete their training and become proficient at their jobs. The COVID-19

Share Your FSIS Stories and Snapshots!

Send articles and photos to Beacon@usda.gov. Articles must be original works that have been cleared by your supervisor and contain the author's name and contact information. Submissions should not exceed 250 words. *The Beacon* editorial staff will edit submissions for content and length.

High-resolution photos must be submitted as a separate attachment in .jpg format. Provide a media release form for photos of individuals under 18 years of age.

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The Beacon Mission Statement

The Beacon newsletter is prepared by the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education to provide relevant mission critical information to all FSIS employees. The Beacon provides employees information about the Agency's proposed regulations, policies and programs; training opportunities; and important employee welfare initiatives to connect employees to the mission and build a cohesive community. The Beacon enables employees to stay up-to-date with the latest events and see the Agency's mission executed in action.

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Deadline for submissions is the first day of the previous month.

Apr. issue – due Mar. 1 May issue – due Apr. 1
June issue – due May 1 July issue – due June 1

Articles will be considered for publication in the order in which they are received. If your article is time sensitive, please indicate that in the subject line of your submission email. Due to the number of submissions received each month and the limited amount of space, we unfortunately cannot guarantee that your submission will be used.

The FSIS Management Council

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Adapting to Challenges: Employee Orientation

pandemic paused in-person meetings for a few months until the virus was better understood and safety measures could be put in place.

Suzette Woerner, an Office of Field Operations resource management specialist in the Dallas District, said it was important for her district to safely resume in-person orientations and onboardings because "we felt that new employees were missing out on the full learning experience: the feeling of being part of a supportive team, and access to their mentors, trainers, immediate supervisors and District Management Staff. We have the office space to sufficiently social distance, and we wear face masks during group meetings."

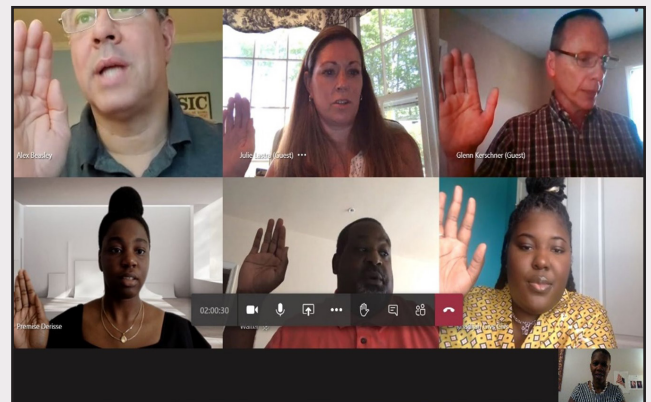
Woerner continued, "The hybrid approach of meeting partially virtual and partially in-person has allowed us to continue performing our food safety mission while building a close-knit team. It also helps new employees to be better inspectors because group settings allow for them to ask questions and to learn from each other."

FSIS' ability to adapt to change — whether when modernizing or when faced with an unprecedented pandemic — enables the Agency to continue to fulfill its regulatory requirements while providing employees with the skills and knowledge they need.

Said Matthews, "The move to virtual orientation and onboarding are good examples of the Agency's flexibility. This continues to help us meet hiring needs and our food safety missions even as we face challenges."

These six new FSIS employees take the Oath of Office during their virtual orientation conducted by Cecilia Matthews, manager of Office of Employee Experience and Development's (OEED) Employee Orientation Program (pictured, bottom right).

Pictured, top row, from left: Alex Beasley, Office of Management (OM) lead property management specialist; Julie Lastra, Office of Public



Affairs and Consumer Education (OPACE) Congressional and Public Affairs deputy director; and Glenn Kerschner, OM safety and occupational health specialist. Pictured, second row, from left: Premise Derisse, Office of Chief Financial Officer accountant; Walter Roman, OM space management specialist; and Khadijah Givs, OPACE web content manager. Pictured, bottom row: Matthews. Image courtesy of Cecilia Matthews, OEED.

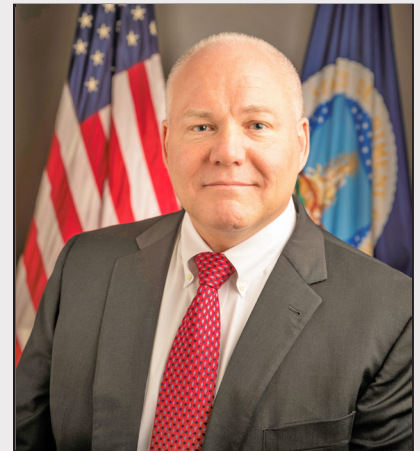
Acting Deputy Under Secretary's Column

This is the first full month of the new administration. As under every administration, FSIS will continue protecting America's food supply. The transition has been smooth, and we have a team in place to ensure inspection and administrative continuity. The Agency, as well as the Department, will share any new policies through our usual communication avenues. Thank you for your patience during this time and, as always, please direct any questions to your supervisors.

This month also sees the continuation of the COVID-19 vaccination rollout. Please be assured that FSIS leadership is working hard to encourage state agencies to ensure priority vaccination for our field personnel, including in-plant and lab employees. I am proud of the Agency's dedication to our food safety mission during the pandemic and FSIS leadership is equally dedicated to ensuring your safety. As we obtain more information, we will share it with you during future town halls, *The Beacon* and in the *Wednesday Newsline*.

A positive change I want to highlight is a new way to access our Agency communications. All FSIS employees now have access to eDevices for administrative and communication

activities. I hope you are becoming familiar with the systems, as well as making the time in your schedule to access the eDevices on a regular basis. The digital transition is part of our modernization strategy to ensure that we remain on the forefront of global food safety and to produce more consistent, convenient, and accessible communication. It also allows the Agency to reduce paper waste. These devices should ultimately allow you more time to focus on your essential duties and to track your activities more easily. Again, thank for your continued teamwork and dedication to our mission as the Agency works to implement its strategic goals.



Paul Kiecker

FSIS Annual Safety Requirements

By Michael Lyons, OM
Phone: (402) 344-5145

Calendar Year 2021 is well underway, so it's a good time to take note of workplace safety related tasks and training that must be completed at least once per year. Keep an eye out for deadlines; some come along much sooner than Dec. 31!

Lockout Program. "Lockout" is a procedure that aims to protect employees from the unexpected startup of dangerous machines or release of stored energy sources while an employee is performing maintenance or servicing a piece of equipment. There are two requirements for this program: inspection and retraining. An inspection of the energy control procedure shall be performed annually by an authorized employee (often a supervisor) other than the ones utilizing the energy control procedures being inspected ([FSIS Directive 4791.11](#), Rev.1 Part XII). This must be completed in the first quarter of the calendar year, so the deadline is March 31, 2021. Retraining must be provided whenever the energy control procedure changes. Additional training is required if the annual review reveals that an employee's knowledge of the procedure is inadequate ([FSIS Directive 4791.11](#), Rev.1 Part XIII). Supervisors and inspectors-in-charge must submit a

letter annually to their district office in January certifying that all inspectors are proficient.

Hearing Conservation Program. This program aims to protect FSIS employees who are exposed to occupational noise levels above the required permissible exposure level (PEL) of 85 decibels averaged over an 8-hour shift. There are two requirements for this training: audiometric testing and annual training. FSIS personnel who work in environments where they are exposed to noise levels above the PEL will be included in the medical surveillance program that conducts annual audiometric testing to document any changes from the employee's baseline. FSIS provides annual training to inspection personnel who work in environments where the noise level reaches or exceeds the PEL.

Workplace Safety and Health Inspections — Offices and Establishments. All workplaces should be inspected for occupational safety and health hazards annually using the appropriate form and then posting the form in a conspicuous place. In offices, FSIS management or designee will perform

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CDR Catherine Rockwell is Energized by her Work in OPHS

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

Commander (CDR) Catherine Rockwell, D.V.M., is a senior public health advisor and USDA Public Health Service liaison officer on the Office of Public Health Science's (OPHS) Applied Epidemiology Staff (AES). She has been with the Agency for almost 16 years and stays energized by her work because she is always learning something new. Her FSIS career path has transitioned through several FSIS program areas — from the field, to training, then policy and now science — with each experience complementing the next.

Her FSIS Career Path

Dr. Rockwell began her FSIS career in 2005 as a relief supervisory public health veterinarian with the Office of Field Operations. That same year, she also received her call to active duty with the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps Officers (CCO). She then became a regional trainer in the Office of Employee Experience and Development's Center for Learning where she provided training for enforcement, investigations and analysis officers (EIAO) and was part of a team that developed the Advanced EIAO Methodology Training and new food safety modules.

She transitioned to the Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD) where she wrote FSIS notices, directives and guidance documents. She was project lead for poultry sampling frequency waiver requests from industry and the development of sampling guidance when the modernization of poultry slaughter rule was issued in 2014. She worked collaboratively with other offices, including OPHS, on a variety of initiatives including the U.S. National Residue Program (NRP). The NRP monitors veterinary drug, pesticide and environmental contaminant residues in domestic and imported meat, poultry and egg products.

Because of this collaborative work, her transition from OPPD to OPHS in May 2020 was smooth. Said Dr. Rockwell, "My background in FSIS regulations, policy and plain language communication has helped advance OPHS' program goals and FSIS' strategic goals. With my move to OPHS, I continue to contribute to major FSIS strategic initiatives, including the NRP and NARMS." The National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System (NARMS) is a collaboration among state and local public health departments, and several federal agencies, including USDA. This U.S. public health surveillance system tracks antimicrobial resistance in foodborne and other enteric bacteria.

Dr. Sheryl Shaw, director of AES and Dr. Rockwell's supervisor, said, "We welcomed Commander Rockwell into our AES family in May 2020. She brings a wealth of personal and professional



An avid University of Wisconsin (UW) Badger fan, Dr. Rockwell visited her alma mater in Madison in May 2019 and posed with the UW veterinary school themed Bucky Badger statue. Photo was taken by a classmate.

experiences to the team. Her work ethic, institutional knowledge, friendly attitude and solutions-oriented contributions blend nicely with the team. Catherine is a vital asset to the NARMS team and helps lead and coordinate reviews after outbreak investigations."

Dual Roles in FSIS

Dr. Rockwell currently divides her time between OPHS and her USPHS liaison role. As an AES senior public health advisor, she provides professional and technical support for the

development of investigative summaries and for scientific and technical reports for Agency leadership and stakeholders. She also organizes, leads, facilitates and participates in Agency workgroups as an OPHS subject matter expert.

As a USDA USPHS liaison officer, she provides technical assistance and professional guidance to FSIS CCOs, FSIS personnel, other agencies and organizations. As one of the nation's health-keepers in the USPHS Commissioned Corps, Dr. Rockwell is always available to support health initiatives or deploy to disaster areas. One significant effort involved setting up and staffing medical shelters in the wake of Hurricane Sandy in New Jersey in 2012. In 2007, she deployed on the USNS Comfort, a U.S. Navy hospital ship, on the Partnership for the Americas humanitarian mission to several Central American countries. The veterinary mission was to provide preventive medicine to local residents' pets and livestock.

Path to FSIS

Dr. Rockwell worked as a licensed veterinary technician while she earned her Associate of Applied Science degree in Veterinary Technology at the State University of New York (SUNY) Farmingdale campus. She completed her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology at SUNY Binghamton. She worked for the New York State Agriculture Department as an animal health inspector for several years before going to veterinary school. In 1993, she earned her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from the University of Wisconsin followed by one year of post-

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an annual workplace review to inventory all workplace hazards using [Form 4791.23](#), Safety and Health Inspection Checklist: Office Facilities. In establishments, FSIS management or designee will conduct an establishment safety review using [Form 4791.24](#), Safety and Health Inspection Checklist: Plant Facilities ([FSIS Directive 4791.13](#), Part Two).

OSHA Forms 300, 300A and 301. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Forms 300 and 301 are used each calendar year to record applicable work-related illnesses or injuries that occur at any FSIS work environment to include offices, laboratories and establishments. OSHA recordkeeping begins Jan. 1. Each establishment is required to post OSHA Form 300A in a conspicuous place from Feb. 1 to April 30 for the previous calendar year.

Hazard Communication (HAZCOM). FSIS provides annual training for all impacted employees. The goal of the program is to provide FSIS employees with sufficient information to recognize chemical hazards and take appropriate protective measures. FSIS management or designee shall annually review all hazardous chemical containers found in their workplace to ensure they are properly labeled and their accompanying safety data sheets are readily accessible to FSIS personnel (29 CFR 1910.1200).

For more information, contact the Safety Specialist assigned to your District. Their contact information is available at www.fsis.usda.gov/districtoffices. Scroll to the bottom of the page.

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Faces of Food Safety

graduate work at the Atlantic Veterinary College in Canada and 10 additional years in private practice. Her love of learning later led her to earn a Master's in Public Health from the University of Iowa and board certification in veterinary preventive medicine.

She first learned of opportunities at FSIS — and the USPHS — at a two-day seminar for veterinarians on career options for veterinarians outside of private practice. Representatives from both FSIS and USPHS were in attendance. At the time, she was looking for an opportunity to use her veterinary training in a different way and found a federal career in public health very intriguing. Additionally, USPHS offered her an opportunity to serve her country and expand her career opportunities. “I continue to be energized by the work that I do both in food safety and in the broader public health arena,” she said.

Outside Interests

Married 22 years to James “Mitch” Rockwell, the couple have two college-aged children, Erin and Brendan. Before the pandemic, Dr. Rockwell and her children volunteered at a local food bank where they helped organize distribution of food to needy families.

Dr. Rockwell is passionate about food security and food waste, and volunteering with her family helps fulfill a basic need for food and improved nutrition for those in need. She said, “As a veterinarian and CCO, my interest extends beyond the singular focus of food safety to address food waste, a problem in this country and one that the USDA is working to address directly and through partnerships. Reducing food waste provides opportunities to improve food security to vulnerable and underserved populations.”



Dr. Rockwell, a Lieutenant Commander in the USPHS at the time, and U.S. Army Sgt. Leona Thomas (back) provide veterinary care during a four-month humanitarian deployment to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2007. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Joshua Karsten.

Human Resources Information Sessions and FAQs for Supervisors

Live and On-Demand Every Month

The FSIS Gateway Program is currently hosting the Office of Management's monthly information sessions for new and experienced supervisors on human resources topics, including a Frequently Asked Questions section. Details including dates, times and registration information are issued to supervisors directly via FSIS Gateway announcements. Previously recorded webinars will soon be available to view on-demand via the Supervisor Help Button. For questions, please contact Kimberly Kelley, OEED at (202) 309-4057 or Kimberly.Kelley@usda.gov.

SNAPSHOTS FROM



Green Bay, Wis.

On Jan. 4, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety (pictured, right) thanked FSIS employees at Establishment M-562, a beef harvesting and processing plant, for their continued support of the Agency's mission during the challenges we face.

Pictured, front row, from left: Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Rebecca Hauser, Food Inspectors (FI) Monica Bane, Ashley Williams, Jennifer Wagner and Debbie Nelson and Kiecker. Pictured, second row, from left: FIs Kevin Powell, Brandi Miklos, Amber DuChateau and Beth Miller. Pictured, back row, from left: FI Adolfo Perez, Consumer Safety Inspectors Juan Aguilar and Dan Powell and Frontline Supervisor Vern VanBeek. Photo by Gregg Owen, OFO.

Green Bay, Wis.

On Jan. 4, inspection personnel assigned to Establishment M-410, a beef harvesting and processing plant, met Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row, center) and shared their thoughts about the continued use of face masks and face shields. Kiecker also toured the facility and took time to commemorate the visit with a photo.



Pictured, first row, from left: Frontline Supervisor (FLS) Vern VanBeek, Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Glenn Strzelecki, Food Inspector (FI) Hailey Hebner and Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Paula Valeria. Pictured, second row, from left: FI Brian Krueger, CSI Derek Moede, FI Irene Ramirez Ocampo, CSI Cristina Vera and FI Gregory Elbe. Pictured, back row, from left: Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Paul Kiecker, FI David Famous and Supervisory CSI Osvaldo Galo and FIs Angel Silva and Andrew Brehmer. Photo by Jody Boucher, OFO.

THE FIELD



Franklin, Wis.

On Jan. 5, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Paul Kiecker (pictured, second, from right) visited Establishment (Est.) M-2444, a veal and lamb harvest and processing facility. During the visit, Kiecker toured the facility and spoke with FSIS inspection personnel about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Kiecker is photographed with inspectors assigned to Est. M-2444. They include (pictured, from left) Food Inspector Brenda Harris, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Sara Hanson de Peralta, Consumer Safety Inspector Desiree Howard, Kiecker and Frontline Supervisor Dr. Kelly Mowell. Photo by an establishment employee.



Sheboygan, Wis.

Pictured, from left: Frontline Supervisor Vern VanBeek, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Paul Kiecker and Consumer Safety Inspector Zoltan Toth met on Jan. 4 at Establishment M-2422B, a meat and poultry processing plant. Kiecker visited employees and toured the plants they are assigned to during a two-day trip in the Badger State. Photo courtesy of Vern VanBeek, OFO.

Town Hall Roundup

FSIS employee Town Hall Meetings are live phone conferences hosted by Agency leadership. Watch your email for meeting invitations and the *Wednesday Newsline* for information about the next meeting.

In each issue, *The Beacon* will bring you highlights of the previous month's meeting. [Recordings](#) are also available on InsideFSIS, the Agency intranet site (requires eAuthentication). Please continue to send your questions and suggestions to the FSIS Feedback mailbox, FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

Jan. 13 Town Hall Highlights

New Administration Transition. "I want to assure you that, as with any transition to a new administration, we have a transition team in place, and we are prepared to continue to carry out our congressionally mandated responsibilities," said Administrator Paul Kiecker. "I will be Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety and Terri Nintemann will be Acting Administrator until a new USDA Office of Food Safety team is selected."

Annual Leave Restoration and Carryover. Legislation and regulations have recently provided changes for essential workers during the COVID-19 emergency (and future emergencies) to have leave restored and, for non-essential employees, to carry over more leave than previously allowed. Essential employees whose balance exceeded the 240-hour cap at the end of the 2020 leave year will receive annual leave restoration **provided that the employee was performing essential work**, and therefore unable to take annual leave. The Agency determined that, for leave restoration purposes, employees who performed inspections, investigations and laboratory bench work performed essential work. FSIS is awaiting further instructions from the Department on how to process leave restoration for these employees. Employees will have two years from the declared end of the emergency to use these hours. Employees who do not fall under the automatic restoration process and forfeited leave may request individual leave restoration during an emergency according to Notice 60-20, issued Nov. 16.

Employees **not performing essential work**, but who forfeited annual leave above the usual carryover limit of 240 hours at the end of the 2020 leave year, will receive an increase to their annual leave carryover. Recent legislation set a new, temporary cap on the number of hours employees can carry over from 2020 to use in 2021. For most employees, the cap — only for 2021 — is 300 hours of annual leave. Employees must use carryover leave that is above 240 hours during the 2021 leave year or those hours will expire and be subject to forfeiture.

CARE Survey. The FSIS Civil Rights Staff is conducting Compliance Assistance, Review and Evaluation (CARE) reviews of some districts and program areas. The Alameda, Denver and Philadelphia Districts, OCFO and OPHS are being reviewed during FY 2021. CARE reviews help determine if the district or program area is complying with civil rights and EEO laws and regulations. The review includes a confidential and voluntary employee survey, a way for employees to provide input about EEO programs in a work unit and to tell the Agency what is or is not working. The survey takes about 30 minutes, and employees who receive the survey will be provided time to complete it. If you have questions, contact the Civil Rights Staff at 1-800-269-6912 or AskCRD@usda.gov.

Updates

COVID-19 Vaccines. Widespread vaccination against COVID-19 is critical to stopping the pandemic. Frontline essential workers supporting the food and agriculture sector are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for vaccination in phase 1b. Vaccination distribution is being managed by state and local authorities, so plans may vary significantly between localities. Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety Paul Kiecker said, "We are staying in communication with CDC and state and local health officials as vaccine implementation proceeds. We sent a [letter](#) to the States encouraging priority vaccination for FSIS personnel, and we will continue to advocate for your access to the vaccine. Our priority, as always, is your safety." FSIS employees are strongly encouraged to pursue vaccination as it becomes available to them. For frequently asked questions about COVID-19 vaccination, see CDC's [website](#).

Repayment of Payroll Tax Deferral. On Dec. 27, new legislation extended the repayment period for the temporary deferral of Social Security, Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) tax withholdings. Repayment is now projected for Jan. 1-Dec. 18, 2021. The 2020 deferred withholding is being collected from pay, divided evenly among 26 pay periods. The legislation does not excuse the obligation to repay nor authorize lump-sum repayment of the obligation. The prorated amounts were to be reflected on the Statement of Earnings and Leave for Pay Period 26 of 2020, and the National Finance Center will issue the necessary form to impacted employees. Please submit questions to your human resources or payroll office.

Timesheets and eDevices. All inspectors should now be able to use eDevices on a recurring basis during their normal tours of duty. This gives them immediate access to several Agency resources, including WebTA for submitting their own timesheets. As of Jan. 1, 2021, FSIS stopped printing materials for distribution to all employees; therefore, paper timesheets are no longer available.

Reminders

Proper Use of Protective Equipment. "We still need to stay vigilant with our prevention methods. I want to remind everyone that the mask needs to cover both the mouth and the nose, and the face shield needs to

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Recent FSIS Retirees

Thank you for your service and dedication to public health.

Name/Position	Duty Station	Years of Service	Name/Position	Duty Station	Years of Service
Aguilar-Castro, Dora I., CSI	Carolina, Puerto Rico	33	Lawler, William J., SCSO	New York-Queens, N.Y.	24
Ahmed, Mohammed S., SVMO	Chattanooga, Tenn.	35	Layton, Randal C., SVMO	Athens, Ga.	16
Anderson, Clark M., SVMO	West Liberty, Iowa	13	Lucas, Marcia J., EIAO	Ola, Ark.	28
Back, Terry M., CSI	Albany, Ky.	23	Luke, Royal W., CSI	Passaic, N.J.	40
Barros, Myra E., SVMO	Portland, Ore.	35	Mangrum, Dorothy, CSI	Collins, Miss.	31
Benitez, Deborah, EIAO	Albuquerque, N.M.	23	Marino, Joseph W., CSI	Warsaw, N.C.	36
Benson, Thomas W., CSI	Homewood, Ala.	45	Marsh, Calvin S., CSI	Sanford, N.C.	40
Blough, David A., CSI	McKees Rocks, Pa.	39	Masood, Khalid, DDM	Des Moines, Iowa	36
Byler, Conny D., CI	Springdale, Ark.	31	Miller, Ladonna K., CSI	Corbin, Ky.	35
Clark, Tammy L., CSI	Albertville, Ala.	31	O'Keefe, Margaret M., CSO	Washington, D.C.	33
Clifford, Jay P., SCSO	Chelsea, Mass.	32	Owens, Sharon K., SVMO	Sanford, N.C.	23
Coleman, Maggie L., FI-S	Enterprise, Ala.	14	Phelps, Lou A., CSI	Cromwell, Ky.	22
Collins, Shannon T., HR Spec.	Minneapolis, Minn.	32	Piccirilli, Joseph F., CSI	Goshen, N.Y.	32
Constancio, Ezequiel B., CSI	Lubbock, Texas	36	Platko, Paulette M., CSO	Dallas, Texas	31
Conway, Mary J., FI-S	Milford, Del.	13	Qureshi, Muhammad R., SVMO	New York-Queens, N.Y.	37
Cooper, Scott H., CSI	Pelican Rapids, Minn.	36	Reed, James P., Supv. CI	Little Rock, Ark.	39
Corletto, Werner R., CSI	Anderson, Calif.	27	Richard, Vista G., CSI	Kirksville, Mo.	31
Dahl, Gary A., CSI	Pelican Rapids, Minn.	41	Rivera, Michael, CSI	Houston, Texas	57
Davis Jr., Harold, CSI	Rockmart, Ga.	28	Salazar, Bertha A., CSI	Manteca, Calif.	36
Derringer, John T., SCSO	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	45	Schrock, Gregory L., CSI	Milford, Ind.	14
Donaldson, James H., CSI	Bow, Wash.	25	Sharma, Yudhir, DM	Albany, Calif.	33
Dozier, Lorraine, SVMO	Forest, Miss.	38	Shrieves, James H., CSO	Quincy, Mich.	12
Drake, Shelly J., CSI	Albuquerque, N.M.	35	Singleton-Pena, Robbin H., CSI	San Antonio, Texas	25
Edwards, Deborah A., SVMO	Smithfield, Va.	36	Spencer Jr., Delmer A., CSI	Ponca City, Okla.	35
Emerson, Jacqueline S., CSI	Timberville, Va.	34	Stuart, David W., FI-S	California, Mo.	38
Fuller, John R., SVMO	Canton, Miss.	14	Sullivan, Bettie J., CSI	Bonneville, Miss.	30
Gabel, Gregory K., SVMO	Greeley, Colo.	31	Toms, Jerry G., CSI	Manhattan, Kan.	39
Grinde, Edward L., CSI	San Bernardino, Calif.	32	Tyus, Gerald R., CSI	Waco, Texas	13
Harl, Charles R., CSI	Evansville, Ind.	18	Wagner, Jack A., SVMO	Panama City, Fla.	33
Henson, Alice J., CSI	Murrayville, Ga.	42	Walton, Barbara J., HR Spec.	Minneapolis, Minn.	37
Hinke, Stephen J., FI-S	Endeavor, Wis.	10	Wharton-Williams, Deborah F., CSI	Nashville, Tenn.	27
Hove, Julie R., Supv. Financial Sys. Anal.	Urbandale, Iowa	41	Williams, John B., CSI	Yates Center, Kan.	31
Hutchinson, Bruce D., SVMO	Albertville, Ala.	38	Williams, Pamela M., FI-S	Clinton, N.C.	29
Johnson, Jacquelyn A., CSI	Sanford, N.C.	36	Wilson, Shirley, FI-S	Sebastopol, Miss.	21
Johnston, John J., Sr. Chemist	Fort Collins, Colo.	30	Woodworth, Nada J., SVMO	Maysville, Mo.	31
Jones, James C., Microbio. Staff Officer	Athens, Ga.	32	Wright II, Benson G., SVMO	Sebastopol, Miss.	34
Kain, Michael C., CI	Philadelphia, Pa.	36	Young Jr., William V., CSI	Toms River, N.J.	15

POLICY UPDATES

FSIS issues notices and directives to protect the public's health. New issuances are available at www.fsis.usda.gov/regulations.

- Notice 67-20, Retail Exempt and Custom Exempt Tasks in the Public Health Information System.
- Notice 69-20, In-Field Study to Test a New Sample Collection Method for Beef Manufacturing Trimmings.
- Notice 70-20, Egg Products Inspection Regulatory Changes.
- Notice 71-20, Import Reinspection Activities Impacted by Publication of the Amended Egg Products Inspection Regulations.
- Notice 72-20, Requesting Sign Language Interpreter Services.
- Notice 01-21, Fiscal Year 2021 – Student Loan Repayment Program for In-Plant Veterinary Medical Officers – Application Timeframe.
- Notice 02-21, Availability of Guidance Documents on Donating Product and Responding to Customer Complaints.
- Notice 03-21, 2021 Mileage Reimbursement Rates.
- Notice 04-21, Profile Updates in Domestic Establishments that Produce Raw Chicken and Turkey Products.
- Directive 5030.1 Rev. 2, Inspection Methodology Utilizing the Public Health Information System for the Verification of Regulatory Compliance in Egg Products Plants.
- Directive 10,230.3, FSIS Verification Testing of Domestic Egg Products.
- Directive 5100.3 Rev. 4, Administrative Enforcement Action Decision Making and Methodology.
- Directive 9500.8 Rev. 2, Importation of Products for Other than Commercial Purposes.
- Directive 9510.1 Rev. 2, Importation of Undenatured Inedible Meat, Fat, Rendered Fat, Poultry and Egg Products.
- Directive 9900.3 Rev. 2, Prestamping Imported Product.
- Directive 9900.5 Rev. 2, Label Verification of Imported Meat, Poultry and Egg Products.
- Directive 9900.8 Rev. 2, Meat, Poultry and Egg Products Refused Entry into the United States.
- Directive 6100.8 Rev. 1, Instructions for Verification of Immunologically Castrated Hogs.

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Town Hall Roundup

extend below the bottom of the chin and wrap around the sides of the face,” said Kiecker. “I have observed when visiting plants that some FSIS employees are not meeting these requirements. Remember, this is for your safety and those around you.” Supervisors are expected to enforce these policies. If an employee has a medical condition, the employee can request a reasonable accommodation by working through that process.

Questions from FSISFeedback@usda.gov

Question: Can 80 hours of Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL) still be used and would the employee be eligible to use this in 2021 for COVID-19 testing?

Response from Joe Abbott, Chief Human Capital Officer: EPSL for COVID-19 testing expired on Dec. 31, 2020. Employees may use annual leave, sick leave, another type of paid leave (such as comp time, credit time, etc.) or leave without pay for testing and awaiting results. If you are not sure about protocols or have questions, please check with your supervisor.

Question: What will the requirements be for protective equipment use once an FSIS employee is vaccinated for COVID-19?

Response from Dr. Philip Bronstein, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Field Operations: Until CDC guidance indicates otherwise, FSIS will maintain our requirement that Agency in-plant personnel wear protective gear, including employees who have received the vaccine.

Question: Have humane handling inspector positions been abolished?

Response from Natalie Duncan, Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Management: The Humane Handling, or HH GS-8, position was abolished when reclassification placed all consumer safety inspectors (CSIs) on one position description at the GS-9 full-performance level. If you have more questions, we encourage you to speak with your supervisor.

Tutoring Resources

The Federal Employee Education and Assistance Fund has developed a program that offers free academic online tutoring for full-time federal employees who earn an annual salary of under \$100,000 and have children in grades K-12. Employees with a salary over the cap can access services for a fee. To register or learn more about eligibility and how to access the program, go to feea.org.



RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

December 17	FSIS issued a public health alert for ready-to-eat pork snack stick products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen.
December 19	Perfect Pasta Inc., an Addison, Ill., establishment, recalled an undetermined amount of heat treated not shelf stable frozen meat and poultry products that were produced without the benefit of federal inspection.
December 19	FSIS issued a public health alert for raw frozen New Orleans - Roasted Chicken Wings products imported and labeled with a false USDA mark of inspection.
December 19	Nestlé Prepared Foods, a Springville, Utah, establishment, recalled approximately 92,206 pounds of LEAN CUISINE Baked Chicken meal products that may be contaminated with extraneous materials, specifically pieces of white hard plastic.
December 23	CLS Gourmet CL Saigon Food Company, a Philadelphia, Pa., establishment, recalled approximately 128,841 pounds of various meat products that were produced without the benefit of federal inspection.
December 31	FSIS issued a public health alert for approximately 49 pounds of frozen, fully cooked, not shelf stable chicken sriracha ravioli products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen.
January 2	Courage Production, LLC., a Fairfield, Calif., establishment recalled approximately 1,645 pounds of ready-to-eat, fully cooked Polish sausage products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen.
January 7	FSIS issued a public health alert for approximately 43 pounds of not-ready-to-eat (NRTE), heat treated, not fully cooked chicken enchilada products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen.
January 15	FSIS issued a public health alert for ready-to-eat beef jerky products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen.
January 15	Nestlé Prepared Foods, a Mt. Sterling, Ky., establishment, recalled approximately 762,615 pounds of not-ready-to-eat pepperoni hot pockets product that may be contaminated with extraneous materials, specifically pieces of glass and hard plastic.
For more information, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls .	

AROUND THE AGENCY

Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education Public Affairs Specialist Buck McKay (right) and Office of Field Operations Food Inspector Maribel Flores inspect a carcass on Jan. 6 at Establishment M-262, a beef slaughter and processing plant in Dodge City, Kansas. McKay received inspection training during a visit to the Springdale District. Photo by Dr. Hany Sidrak, OFO.



FSIS EMPLOYEE CONNECTIONS



Submitting Your Employee Photos

By Felicia Thompson, OPACE

Wearing face masks/coverings and practicing social distancing may be a way of life for the foreseeable future. FSIS employees will continue to gather for meetings and other events and capture those memorable moments in pictures.

To ensure employee-submitted images are suitable and reflect current health and safety recommendations, employees in the photographs should practice social distancing (whenever possible, to the extent possible for a group shot), wear face masks/coverings over both the mouth and nose and wear face shields when performing duties on the processing and slaughter floors. The recommended 6-10 feet of separation is not always possible in the workspace, but photos should include as much separation between individuals as the work space will allow.



This photo is a good example of employees practicing social distancing and properly wearing face masks that cover both the nose and mouth. In this setting, a laboratory, face shields are not required, as they are during processing and slaughter inspection.

Health and Wellness

By Jodi Hallstrom, OM and Laura Reiser, OPACE

The Agency's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and the WorkLife4You program, provided by Federal Occupational Health (FOH), are voluntary and confidential employee benefits available to FSIS employees and their family members at no cost.

While federal agencies are required to provide an EAP to its employees, FSIS has opted to provide "add-on" services, such as WorkLife4You, Emergency Backup Dependent Care and an employee discount center called LifeMart®. No matter whether a service or benefit falls under EAP or WorkLife4You, they are there for your personal well-being, and FSIS wants you to become familiar with the services and benefits.

Even under "normal" times, life can be stressful or even overwhelming. The COVID-19 pandemic has complicated life even more as parents struggle to find childcare due to school closures; essential workers continue their agencies' missions while taking steps to prevent the spread of the virus to coworkers; and families avoiding social gatherings to prevent creating a super spreader event.

An Emergency is Not Necessary

EAP and the WorkLife4You program also provide a host of services and benefits, like the Emergency Backup Dependent Care program, which helps families find alternatives for child and adult care. The Agency is participating again in the program in fiscal year 2021. The programs can also assist with finding a dog walker, a plumber or help you understand your parents' Medicare coverage.

EAP and WorkLife4You are more than a service; they are a personal assistant when you need it most.

Contact FOH at 800-222-0364 (TTY: 888-262-7848) for information or assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The websites www.foh4you.com (EAP) and www.worklife4you.com (new user registration code: FSIS) also have a wealth of information and resources. Challenge yourself in 2021 to try an EAP or WorkLife4You service or benefit.

Employee Discounts: The LifeMart® Discount Center offers millions of pre-negotiated discounts on a wide variety of products and services, such as delivery and streaming services, grocery

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These FSIS employees have met milestones of 30, 40 or 50 years of Federal service. They are listed by number of years, then alphabetically. We congratulate you and thank you for your dedication to public service and to public health.

Name/Position	Duty Station	Years of Service	Name/Position	Duty Station	Years of Service
Conrad III, James J., CSI	York, Neb.	40	Huey, William J., CSI	Dexter, Mo.	30
Garcia, Jose Gutierrez, FI-S	San Angelo, Texas	40	Hunt, Bobby, CSI	Lumber Bridge, N.C.	30
Kraus, David H., CSI	Emporia, Kan.	40	Jackson, Shelia Louise, Prog. Spec.	Athens, Ga.	30
Cater, Lyn A., CSI	Turlock, Calif.	30	Riggelman, Jesse L., CSI	Bridgewater, Va.	30
Collins, Lana Kay, CSI	Carthage, Miss.	30	Sherman, Paul A., CI	Salem, Ore.	30
Dandridge, Angela, CSI	Gadsden, Ala.	30	Wilks, Deanna L., CSI	Cassville, Mo.	30
Hamric, Jonathan C., CI	Montgomery, Ala.	30	Williams, Theresa D., Dir.	Washington, D.C.	30
Harp, Tina K., CSI	Gainesville, Ga.	30			

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Health and Wellness

coupons, learning resources and more. Employees and their family members can use any personal device (iPhone, iPad, Android, Notebook, etc.) to access the discount center. Go to discountmember.lifecare.com and use LMDISCOUNTS for both the screen name and password. (When making purchases on LifeMart, employees must use a non-government, personal device. Shopping on government computers is strictly prohibited.)

Daily Life Needs: Work/Life consultants are available to research options and provide personalized referrals to resources for any of your daily living needs, such as home improvement and cleaning professionals, lawn service, pet care and classes, relocation services, catering or event planning.

EAP Counseling: Employees and/or their family members are eligible to receive up to six counseling sessions with a licensed or credentialed counselor, per issue, per person, per year.

Financial and Legal Services: Consultation with financial experts and licensed attorneys is available to assist with issues that require financial or legal guidance. The first consultation with an attorney

on any given topic is offered at no charge (for up to 60 minutes).

Childcare and Parenting: Childcare specialists provide 24-hour support in finding trusted local childcare resources, including daycare, summer camp, after-school programs and tutoring. They can also help find supportive services for children with special needs and consult on parenting.

Senior Care and Professional Care Management Services: Providing care for older loved ones can be time-consuming and overwhelming for working professionals. Adult care specialists provide counseling, education, and referrals to care for older loved ones, including adult care options, living arrangements, meal delivery, transportation, hospice services and respite care.

WorkLife4You Kits: Call 800-222-0364 (TTY: 888-262-7848) or visit www.worklife4you.com to request a free kit for some of life's greatest milestones, including prenatal care, child safety, college preparation, adult care, personal wellness and first aid for pets. Each kit containing related products and information is sent to the employee's residence.

Celebrating the Contributions of African Americans

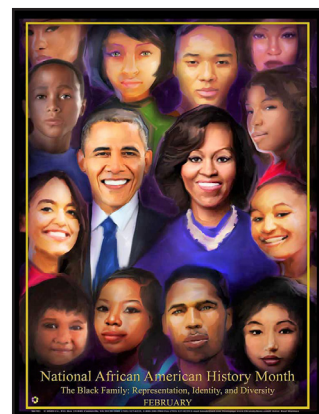
By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Each February, we celebrate Black History Month to honor the contributions that African Americans have made to American history. In 1915, historian and author Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now known as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, or "ASALH"). Through the organization, Dr. Woodson initiated the first Negro History Week in February 1926, selecting the week in February that included the birthdays of two key figures in the history of African Americans – Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

Five decades later, ASALH expanded the observance to Black History Month, also known as African American History Month. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black (or African American) History Month. Other countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany

and the Netherlands, have joined the United States in celebrating people of African descent and their contributions to history and culture.

ASALH sets this year's theme as "The Black Family: Representation, Identity and Diversity." The black family knows no single location as genetic-ancestry searches testify to the spread of family members across states, nations and continents. It also offers a rich tapestry of images – from captive to free citizen, from patriarchal to matriarchal, and from stereotype to the hero.



Circuit Donates Hygiene Products for Women and Children

By Michael Piotrowski, OFO Philadelphia District

The Philadelphia Circuit conducted an awareness drive in October 2020 to support victims of domestic violence and collected 360 hygiene products. The items were donated to two shelters in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Porcupine, South Dakota. Both facilities assist women and their children in times of need. The hygiene products will be used to make “care kits” for clients arriving at the shelters.

This photo shows FSIS staff members with some of the hygiene products they collected and donated. EIAO Paul Zinskie (not pictured) shipped a portion of the donated products to his sister who works at the shelter in Porcupine, South Dakota.

Pictured, from left: Consumer Safety Inspectors William Smith, Stephen Josephson, Anthony Hicks, Michael Piotrowski and Jose Perez. Not pictured are CSIs George Lightcap, Muhammad Mahmood and Anthony Miller. Photo courtesy of Michael Piotrowski, OFO.



CSIs Feed Families in Need

By Melissa Bufford, OFO Chicago District

Dayshift employees assigned to Establishment P-44826 in Canton, Ohio, held a “Friendly Food Drive Challenge” to collect food items for those less fortunate during the holiday season. The day shift collected 606.69 pounds and the afternoon shift collected 556.63 pounds. The donations went to churches and food banks in the local area.

Dayshift employees (pictured, left) Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Amanda Loprich and (pictured, right, from front to back) CSIs Brian Buckle, Tom Vang and Kimberly Tennant appear with the food items they collected and donated to families in need. Photo by Dr. Melissa Bufford, OFO.



Los Angeles CSIs Partner with First Responders for Toy Drive

By Rickey Cox, OFO Alameda District

FSIS employees in the Los Angeles Circuit collected and donated toys to the Vernon Fire Department’s (VFD) 2020 Toy Drive. VFD holds an annual toy drive for children in Los Angeles County, California, who may not otherwise receive gifts during the holidays.

Fire department personnel (kneeling) and (pictured, back row, standing) FSIS Consumer Safety Inspectors Guillermina Ibarra, Mary Alvarez and Rickey Cox gather in front of Engine 52, one of VFD’s fire emergency vehicles. Photo by a VFD firefighter.



Black Ice is Clear and Dangerous!

By Leo O'Drudy, OPACE

One winter hazard is “black ice,” which got its name because it is clear and looks black on asphalt roads. However, black ice can also be present on sidewalks and steps, but will be an almost invisible layer over red brick or gray/beige concrete. Not only is it hard to see, but it is slippery – a dangerous combination.

Black ice is most prevalent during the early morning hours, especially after snow melts on road surfaces and freezes overnight when the temperature drops below 32 degrees. Black ice can also form when roadways are slick from rain and temperatures drop below freezing overnight, or when air temperature is warmer than pavement, which causes moisture to rapidly freeze.

When driving, keep in mind that stopping distances are longer on ice, so slow down, especially on bridges, overpasses and tunnels. If skidding, steer into the skid. If you are in an accident, stay in your car and call for help.

To prevent slips, trips and falls, clear walking surfaces of snow and ice, and spread de-icer as quickly as possible after a winter storm. Wear proper footwear such as insulated, water-resistant boots with good rubber treads, or a pair of rubber overshoes with good treads over other shoes. Take short steps and walk at a slower pace, so you can react to the changes in traction.

Remember, if it's too slippery to walk safely, it's too slippery to drive safely.

Sources for this article and for more information:

www.osha.gov/winter-weather

www.osha.gov/winter-weather/hazards#winterdriving

www.dot.state.mn.us/workzone/blackice.html

www.austintexas.gov/page/winter-weather-safety



FSIS Employee Connections

The Connections is employee-centric and features the personalities that make up FSIS through employee profiles, individual and team accomplishments, original visual and literary works, and on- and off-duty activities, such as performing inspiring community service.

- I) For consideration for the April 2021 issue, send cleared articles and high-resolution .jpg-format photographs that adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's social distancing guidelines and properly worn personal protective equipment to FSISConnections@usda.gov by Mar. 1. Include a detailed caption about what is happening; date and location of activity (e.g., city, state, plant number, building, etc.); names, titles and program areas (e.g., OFO Des Moines District, OIEA, OPPD) for each individual. Date and location (e.g., city, state, plant number, building, etc.). Please send questions or requests for forms to use a minor in a photo to FSISConnections@usda.gov.

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FSIS employees and applicants for employment wishing to file an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint must first contact an EEO Counselor by calling (301) 504-7755 or 1-800-269-6912, or writing to the FSIS Civil Rights Division at FSIS Civil Rights Staff at USDA/FSIS/OA, 4700 River Road, Suite 1B-01D, Mail Stop 5261, Riverdale, MD 20737. Contact must be made with an FSIS EEO Counselor within 45 calendar days of the date of the matter alleged to be discriminatory or, in the case of a personnel action, within 45 calendar days of the effective date of the personnel action.