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Hear from You

Tell Us 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.

The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

April 2020

FSIS will continue to publish *The Beacon* according to our regular schedule. Employees should continue to participate in all-employee town hall calls, and look for timely information from their supervisors and the Wednesday Newslines.

Meeting the Challenge of COVID-19

By Laura Reiser, OPACE
Phone: (202) 720-7894

FSIS employees have a history of rising to meet challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Mission critical employees, like inspection personnel and laboratory staff, continue their work with the strong support and efforts of their non-frontline colleagues. What drives us varies — for some it is a dedication to public service and for others it is the commitment to public health and ensuring access to a safe food supply.

Unlike other emergency situations, the pandemic affects every single one of us in some way. "I am proud of the ways that FSIS employees have demonstrated that they are flexible, responsive and willing to do what it takes to meet the Agency's mission," FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker told employees at an April 1 town hall meeting.

As in any challenging situation, communication is critical. Access to up-to-date, accurate information is critical to the Agency's success and the safety of everyone. Leadership understands the seriousness of communicating with frontline and all employees during this pandemic and will continue to do so. It is more important now than ever when so much new and updated information is issued rapidly.

Through the FSISFeedback@usda.gov email box and weekly town halls, employees are asking thoughtful questions, offering constructive suggestions and identifying new issues. There have been more than 1,500 participants in the town hall meetings and more than 243 emails, as of April 10.

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Here, we share some of the most frequently asked questions and concerns. Content of FSIS User Notices referred to in the answers below are available on in the employee section of the agency website at www.fsis.usda.gov/employees.

Taking Leave and Codes to Use

Q. How do I know what type of leave to use or leave codes to use for my circumstances?

A. The Office of Personnel Management and USDA are developing further guidance for all employees based on recent legislation that included stipulations for leave and leave usage. Once that guidance becomes available, we will share it with FSIS employees. Until then, we encourage you to work with your supervisor to determine which leave code to use for different situations. They will have the latest guidance available and should be able to answer any questions you have about timekeeping. Guidance was emailed to all users on March 20 as an attachment titled, "FSIS COVID-19 Information Sheet, March 19, 2020." For the most current guidance, please visit www.fsis.usda.gov/employees.

Employees, Family Members with Higher Health Risk

Q. What can employees do if they are in high-risk health groups or have family members in those groups?

A. We share your concern over the safety and well-being of those who are considered higher risk for COVID-19 due to age, health or other factors. Please discuss your concerns with your supervisor; they will be

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The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

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.

Jun. issue – due May 1 Jul. issue – due Jun. 1
Aug. issue – due Jul. 1 Sep. issue – due Aug. 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.

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SPOTLIGHT

USDA's Agricultural Research Service

By Buck McKay, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-0284

Strong partnerships between agencies are imperative to the collective success of USDA. The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and FSIS collaborate to find solutions to agricultural problems from farm to table that affect Americans every day. The U.S. food supply is safer due to this healthy relationship. ARS is one of four agencies in USDA's Research, Education and Economics mission area. The others are the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the Economic Research Service and the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

ARS is USDA's chief in-house scientific research agency, and its mission is to deliver scientific solutions to national and global agricultural challenges. ARS is led by Administrator Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young; Associate Administrator for National Programs Dr. Steven M. Kappes; and Associate Administrator for Research Management and Operations Dr. Simon Liu. ARS is committed to delivering cutting-edge, scientific tools and innovative solutions for American agricultural producers and the surrounding communities. The ARS goals are to support the nourishment and well-being of all people, sustain our nation's agroecosystems and natural resources, and ensure the economic competitiveness of American agriculture. The agency is comprised of 8,000 employees (of which more than 2,000 are scientists and post-doctoral scholars) working on 660 ongoing research projects at more than 90 research locations, including laboratories overseas.

Dr. Isabel Walls, Scientific Liaison at FSIS, noted that ARS and FSIS collaborate to ensure that ARS research is relevant to FSIS goals, aiding FSIS in accomplishing our mission of improving food safety. There are many examples of ARS research having a direct impact on FSIS, and specifically addressed our research needs, including research on new detection methods for foodborne contaminants and intervention strategies to reduce the likelihood of food contamination. In addition, ARS research has improved our understanding of genomics, which has enabled FSIS to improve detection and traceback of outbreaks of foodborne disease using whole genome sequencing.

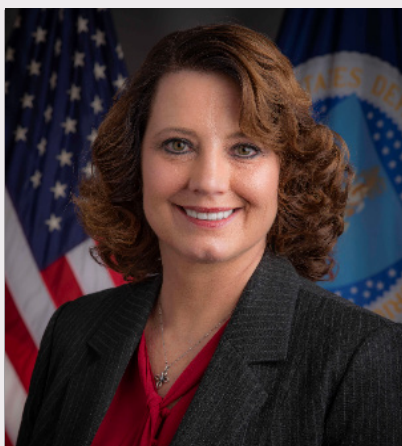
FSIS and ARS held a joint food safety meeting in February to share information on research activities and needs. This meeting is held annually to facilitate coordination between the agencies. The 2020 meeting was organized by the FSIS Office of Public Health Science and included scientists from USDA's Office of the Secretary, Economic Research Service and Agricultural Marketing Service, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration. Approximately 140 participants attended the three-day meeting.

Under Secretary for the Office of Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears opened the meeting by discussing key research needs for FSIS, including

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Under Secretary's Column

The past few weeks have caused us to adapt to a new way of life. I know you are making daily sacrifices and continuing to work under uncertainty, while simultaneously trying to keep your family, loved ones and even yourself safe and healthy. This isn't easy on anyone, but I want you to know how much I appreciate your dedication and hard work.



Dr. Mindy Brashears

Thank you for your continued support of FSIS' food safety mission and for participating in the recent agency town halls. Please continue to attend the town halls and continue to communicate with your supervisors. Also, look for more agency guidance through user notices.

No matter where we are in our lives, we should always continue to learn and grow in our understanding of the world around us. But knowledge alone is not enough; it must be applied and result in behavior change for the greater good. Changing habits can be difficult and putting knowledge into action is a challenge for any organization. FSIS has a goal to influence consumer behavior by introducing new behavior accompanied by data that's validated by science.

One of the greatest transformations I would like to see is a better relationship with stakeholders formed on the foundation of science to reduce foodborne illnesses. Consumer stakeholder groups provide input from individuals who can help us improve food safety and public health. Our work with industry groups runs parallel to our consumer education efforts. They are instrumental in educating and notifying consumers about foodborne illness outbreaks and helping us search for food safety solutions.

I want you to focus on solutions and then actively look for ways to turn solutions into actions. Even if an idea does not come to fruition, it is still valuable! Your input can lead us to innovative solutions or make us more efficient. After interacting with dozens of inspectors across the country, I know this sense of responsibility and commitment to our shared mission is strong, even as we rise to the challenges created by the evolving COVID-19 pandemic.

Administrator's Column

The dedication to public health that drives FSIS has never been more clear as we all deal with the COVID-19 national emergency. As we witness first responders, doctors, nurses, grocery store clerks and many others step up to keep this nation moving forward, we join them in carrying



Paul Kiecker

out our own critical role during this pandemic. Now more than ever, the importance of a safe and abundant food supply is coming into focus as consumers purchase the food and resources needed for sheltering in place for an extended period. Beyond the changes and worries we are all addressing at home, we face new challenges and adjustments at work. We are all adapting to these new situations whether we work at establishments, import houses, labs and offices, or are confined to working at home. Know that your safety is our top priority. We are doing what it takes to keep the public fed — our mission is as important as ever.

Your questions and ideas from town halls and emails are being carefully considered. As new information becomes available, it will go out to everyone via user notices, through supervisory chains and at town hall meetings. It's important that we take steps to seek out updated processes and guidance. We should learn them, follow them and use them when needed and when applicable. Some issues must be handled on a case-by-case basis. For these specific concerns about your situation, I encourage you to go to your supervisor, frontline supervisor or district office.

We should also continue looking at our long-term goals beyond the current crisis. I encourage you to keep looking for opportunities — to share ideas that might solve challenges or to step into a new role, even if temporary. Many of you have written emails to the FSIS Feedback mailbox expressing your support and ongoing commitment to our mission. I echo your sentiments: we are all in this together, and we are here to help. Thank you for continuing our food safety mission during these challenging times.

able to discuss options for those who are considered high risk and will have access to the latest guidance from the Department or can seek clarification from the district office. (See the “Leave & Time Code Usage” link on the InsideFSIS Pandemic & Illness Resources page.)

Social Distancing and Positive Diagnosis

Q. How can a person practice social distancing in the close quarters of inspection areas in an establishment?

A. While we are encouraging employees to following CDC guidance for social distancing, there are times when the physical layout of the plants you work in make social distancing a challenge. The risk of an employee transmitting COVID-19 to another is dependent on distance between employees, the duration of the exposure and the effectiveness of employee hygiene practices and sanitation. When it’s impractical for all employees in plant settings to maintain social distancing, effective hygiene practices (listed below) should be maintained to reduce the chance of spreading the virus. There is more information on COVID-19 at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus or USDA-specific information at www.usda.gov/coronavirus.

Clean your hands often.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

Minimize your contact with others as much as possible through proper social distancing.

- Increase distance between yourself and plant employees within your workspace and as you move around the plant.
- Limit conversations with other employees and stand as far apart as possible.
- Do not hold large, in-person meetings.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily.

- This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desk phones and keyboards.

Stay home if you are sick.

There is more information on COVID-19 at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus and USDA-specific information at www.usda.gov/coronavirus.

Q. What should I do if I — or someone around me — is in in regular contact with someone (plant employee/FSIS colleague/family member) who receives a positive diagnosis?

A. If there is a confirmed case in your immediate circle of contacts — at work or at home — we ask that you notify your supervisor and follow the instructions or precautions of your local health officials. Information about appropriate leave and leave codes was emailed to all users as attachments titled, “FSIS COVID-19 Information Sheet Final” and “Time Codes COVID 19 3 19 20” in

an email titled “Clarification on Leave and Telework Options During COVID-19 Outbreak.” (See the “Leave & Time Code Usage” link on the InsideFSIS Pandemic & Illness Resources page.)

Establishment Actions

Q. Are establishments required to notify USDA if one of their employees tests positive?

A. USDA has asked all establishments to notify FSIS if any of their employees test positive for COVID-19 and FSIS has committed the same to industry. This will allow FSIS personnel to assess themselves and take appropriate actions based on the recommendations of the CDC and local health officials. For the latest information and guidance from the CDC, please visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus to see the CDC Risk Assessment chart. For the most current guidance, please visit www.fsis.usda.gov/employees.

Q. What do we do when establishments are taking temperatures and doing some other wellness checks, like questionnaires?

A. USDA is working closely with the establishments it regulates to ensure the safety and well-being of all in-plant personnel while following the recommendations of the CDC and local health officials.

If during one of the wellness checks it is determined that you are showing symptoms, contact your supervisor immediately and follow the recommendations and instructions of your local health officials. Information regarding facilities serviced and use of leave and other options available was sent to all users on March 20. For the most current guidance, please visit www.fsis.usda.gov/employees.

Personal Protective Equipment and Supplies

Q. Can employees use facemasks in the establishments?

A. On April 3, the CDC released an updated recommendation on the use of cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19. The cloth face coverings recommended by CDC are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.

CDC is now recommending the voluntary use of cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Per the CDC, the purpose of wearing a face covering is to help prevent the transmission of coronavirus from individuals who may be infected but are not showing symptoms. As such, USDA’s mission-essential workforce, whose duties require they continue to work at their primary job site every day and who do not typically wear masks as part of their jobs, may consider wearing a cloth face covering consistent with this updated CDC recommendation. For the most current guidance, please visit www.fsis.usda.gov/employees.

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Hazard Pay

Q: COVID-19 is being considered dangerous. Are employees going to receive hazard pay?

A. The Agency is looking at possible options. FSIS leadership will send updated information as it becomes available.

Leadership appreciates your participation and speaking up through the town hall meetings and email.

"I hope you will all continue to engage with us at headquarters through these town hall calls and by using the feedback mailbox, FSISFeedback@usda.gov," said Kiecker at one town hall.

Help FSIS with Your Suggestions

FSIS employees are offering constructive suggestions and identifying issues of concern by speaking out at town hall meetings and by emailing FSISFeedback@usda.gov. Administrator Paul Kiecker and FSIS leadership appreciate how employees are engaging and making use of these open channels of communication. Along with several suggestions provided during the town hall meetings, there have been more offered via email.

"I hope you will keep sending in ideas and suggestions. Each and every one is being reviewed to see if it can be implemented right away or if it will work for future situations," said Administrator Paul Kiecker.

"Many of us who are immune compromised could continue to work and contribute to the Agency's mission, rather than take the weather and safety leave, while still increasing the level of self-protection," said a consumer safety inspector (CSI) in the Des Moines District. She was one of several employees who suggested that some inspection positions could be considered for telework for part of their duties. Another employee working in the Des Moines District Office asked if the Agency would consider telework for positions that aren't normally telework ready.

At this time, Office of Field Operations leadership at headquarters and the district office management are reviewing positions for this type of eligibility in the district offices.

"In order to comply with social distancing as much as possible, besides having weekly meetings over the phone inspectors can request documents be sent electronically to be reviewed (scan and email)," suggested a CSI in the Chicago District. "I know many establishments won't like this idea. For each establishment that does agree, that would be one less person to be in contact with — little things add up. To my surprise a very large establishment on my patrol has agreed."

There is no regulatory requirement for the format of the weekly meetings between the Inspector-in-Charge and plant management. These are usually done in person and can continue this way while practicing social distancing, or they can be virtual, as long as the expected communications continue.

"There have been many suggestions regarding staffing and coverage of in-plant positions. One is from a CSI in the Raleigh District. "With concerns for staffing and the possibility of a staffing crisis due to COVID-19, what about new WAE (When Actually Employed) CSIs or other food inspector positions?"

The Agency has many WAEs in several positions, including veterinarians, not just food inspectors. OFO is working with Office of Management to fast track hiring. USDA and FSIS have been granted Schedule A COVID-19 hiring authority, which is intended to allow agencies to hire mission critical positions impacted by COVID-19, on a temporary basis. That means we can hire qualified individuals to perform inspection or inspection related work, without posting a vacancy and doing the traditional hiring process. The temporary appointment can be up to a year and extended if COVID-19 pandemic persists.

FSIS employees have been flexible and responsive to filling needs. We've seen CSIs; frontline supervisors; enforcement, investigation and analysis officers; and others work the line and fill positions as needed. We have folks from multiple program areas and district offices ready to fill in-plant positions as needed. HQ has been brainstorming with the district managers and deputy district managers and identifying volunteers from other program areas, state Meat and Poultry Inspection programs and other USDA agencies to help with inspection assignments. We trust the districts are asking all field supervisors to help identify possible volunteer in-plant personnel.

A supervisory consumer safety inspector in Arkansas suggested, "It has always been my thought that FSIS training could be performed via the technology that we all have in place. It could be just as beneficial to have the trainee sit in an office with the training done via webinar. With all the technology available, trainees can still interact with the instructor through the ability to raise hands to ask questions or participate in conversations."

This is a good suggestion and FSIS leadership agrees. OEED offered remote training for the last week of Public Health Veterinarian (PHV) training (10 participants) the week of March 30. We are prioritizing other training offerings, starting with Inspection Methods, to do something similar and will use the feedback from the PHV course to inform future direction.

SNAPSHOTS FROM

Huntington, Pa.

On February 28, Compliance Investigators David Duvall (pictured, left) and Robert Foster, with the Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit, represented FSIS at a career fair at Juniata College. Each year, over 100 employers and approximately 400 students attend the event. Duvall and Foster discussed career opportunities with students and provided an overview of FSIS' food safety mission. The investigators also discussed the importance of food safety and provided food safety information.



Photo by Nokota Harpster, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and courtesy of David Duvall, OIEA.

THE FIELD

Miami Gardens, Fla.

On February 2, Southeast Region staff from the Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit's Compliance Investigations Division (CID) conducted food defense activities for Super Bowl LIV. Compliance investigators worked with the Significant Incident Preparedness and Response Staff and the Office of Public Health Science. Pre-event activities included food defense meetings with food vendors and firms that supplied products to those vendors. On game day, CID staff worked on the All-Hazards/Consequence Management Group. Security was elevated at the event due to its safety designation. CID worked with the FBI, CBP and state and local authorities to effectively implement the food defense plan into the overall security framework.



(Pictured left to right) Larry Hortert, Matthew Carroll, Wanda Fuentes, Bill Kaile, Scott Ehle, Tom Berry, Doug Fulgham, Jeremy Hessman, Jose Pereira, Sandra Fabregas and David Douglas. Photo courtesy of Sandra Fabregas, OIEA.



CFL Training Coordinator Ramon Cana Alvarez (pictured, second step from bottom, left) and Enforcement, Investigations and Analysis Officer Daniel Martin (not pictured) led the IM 1803 training session. Photo by Aaron Lavallee, OPACE.

Dallas, Texas

On February 13, Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, bottom step) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, top of landing, far left) were in Dallas to speak with FSIS and state food inspectors attending the Inspection Methods (IM) 1803 course that is offered by the FSIS Office of Employee Experience and Development's Center for Learning (CFL).

The IM course covers the essential FSIS inspection verification tasks, such as training and hands-on practice using the Public Health Information System; hazard analysis verification; hazard analysis and critical control point verification; sampling; sanitary dressing procedures; humane handling; raw, ready-to-eat and shelf stable product hazards and preventive measures; *Listeria* regulations; export certification; and food defense.

POLICY UPDATES

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

- Notice 10-20, Updated - New FSIS Security Paper and Seven Digit Export Stamp for Use with the Export Module of the Public Health Information System - Phase Three
- Notice 11-20, Eligibility of the United Kingdom to Export Raw Beef to the United States
- Notice 12-20, FSIS Continuing Education Program Open to All Inspectors
- Notice 13-20, Major Revisions of FSIS Export Library for China
- Notice 14-20, National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Standard - AMS Final Rule
- Notice 15-20, Major Revisions of FSIS Export Library for Canada
- Notice 16-20, Voluntary Inspection of Cervid Animals Tested for Chronic Wasting Disease

Get Organized: April is Records Management Month

By Jesus Garcia, OPACE

Phone: (202) 260-9432

This month, records managers commemorate the 25th anniversary of National Records and Information Management Month. This observance spotlights the importance of organizing and maintaining records in all media for effective management.

In federal agencies, an "official record" is a record that has been created for official government use and has been scheduled with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

Records include all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law in connection with the transaction of public business. Records include e-mail, instant messaging, text messages, telephone messages, voice mail messages, presentations, websites, social media, word processing documents, spreadsheets and information systems.

At FSIS, the responsibility of managing records is shared by all. "Each employee is responsible for properly maintaining official government records," said Arianne M. Perkins, FSIS Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) staff director. The FOIA staff not only tracks government records but is also responsible for making records throughout the Agency available to the public. FOIA depends on good records management to deliver legally cleared FSIS documents in a timely manner. Here are some key items to remember:

Scheduled and Unscheduled Records: Know the Difference

Temporary records are those that have been scheduled by NARA to be destroyed after a certain amount of years have passed.

Permanent records are those that have been scheduled by NARA to be kept permanently. Permanent records stay within the

possession of FSIS for a defined period of time and are officially transferred to NARA after that time period has expired.

Unscheduled records are federal records whose final disposition has not been approved by NARA. Such records must be treated as permanent until a final disposition is approved.

Avoid These Pitfalls

- Failing to carry out a routine annual records review and file plan update. This is when a program will take an inventory of their records (both physical and electronic), identify records that are eligible to be destroyed and update their file plans with any new records that the program area maintains.
- Failing to identify electronic records that are kept on network drives, or in systems like SharePoint, and separating them from non-records. Electronic records should have their own network space away from other files, be reviewed annually and destroyed in accordance with our Agency record control schedules.

Do not keep official records on your individual work computer's hard drive. Official records should be kept in central filing systems, designated network space or official Agency systems.

Each program area or office has a designated records management person, and if employees have any questions about records, or what to keep, they should reach out to their records management representative or to the records management staff.

FACES OF FOOD SAFETY

Dr. Catherine Pierce's Job is Different Every Day

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

A Frontline Supervisor (FLS) in the Des Moines District, Dr. Catherine Pierce has been with FSIS for almost 13 years. In this role, she provides oversight and supervision to 3 public health veterinarians (PHV) and 17 consumer safety inspectors in the Madison Circuit. She oversees a variety of establishments, including a cull sow plant, a cull cattle plant, four very small slaughter plants, an egg plant, two thermal processing plants (that make chili, broth and canned lunchmeat) and several smaller packaging operations.

"Providence"

Pierce first learned about FSIS at a going-away party for a close friend, where she met Dr. Dave Ganzel, a district veterinary medical specialist (DVMS) with FSIS. He talked about his job, told her about the role of public health veterinarians and suggested she give FSIS a try. She was starting to get burned out from the long hours working in a small animal practice and was ready to start exploring other career fields. She deems it "providence" that she met Dr. Ganzel at that opportune time in her career.

Since joining FSIS, Pierce has discovered a passion for food safety and humane handling concepts at slaughter. She enjoys her job, finds FSIS to be a great fit for her and is grateful for past supervisors who supported her drive to learn. "There is always something new for me to learn, and I like to share what I learn by teaching others. My past supervisors and the district office were very generous to allow me to attend various trainings offered, affording me opportunities to perform a wide variety of tasks."

Another reason she finds her career with FSIS so rewarding is because of the variety of positions and activities available to her. Said Pierce, "I feel blessed to have had so many different opportunities and job duties in my career with FSIS. I have been a relief supervisory public health veterinarian (SPHV); in-plant SPHV; enforcement, investigations and analysis officer (EIAO)-Trained PHV; DVMS; DVMS-trained PHV; and FLS. I believe I am a better leader as an FLS with this more extensive background and collection of experiences to draw upon to better understand and manage the needs of my direct and indirect reports."

She enjoys the daily challenges in her current role as FLS: she likes solving problems and feels satisfied every time she finishes a task and can check it off her to-do list. She also finds it very gratifying to see that "a-ha!" moment in someone's eyes as she explains a concept or expectation. When she identifies a problem, she enjoys the process of thinking about that problem and offering solutions. Pierce's personal core value aligns with FSIS' "Solutions-Oriented" core value.



Dr. Pierce poses for a picture after a work unit meeting. Photo by Ntyce Hiro, OFO.

Every Day is Different

When asked what a typical workday looks like for her, Pierce said there is no such thing as a "typical workday" for an FLS — as evidenced by her using a pencil instead of pen to write planned events in her day-planner. Every day is different; some days, she is driving at 4:00 a.m. to a plant to observe the inspector completing a pre-op SSOP review and observation task; other days, she is working with one of her staff performing in-plant performance system reviews. Sometimes, she works the line or covers for one of the in-plant SPHVs, performing ante-mortem inspection, humane handling tasks and dispositions. Sometimes, she is working at her computer for the day, writing reports or working on the weekly circuit schedule, and frequently, she is on the phone, answering questions or following up on issues that come up. Said Pierce, "I like that variability in my schedule. It spices up my work and makes each day an exciting new adventure."

Pierce believes her FLS job is all about teamwork; she supports collaboration and encourages communication among all circuit members. She does this by holding team meetings and making sure they have the tools they need to be successful. Through her "open door policy," staff members are welcome to share their ideas and concerns. She wants to see everyone enjoy their work, feel appreciated for the work they do and succeed in their careers.

She is proud of the work that FSIS does; says Pierce, "Our nation is well-known for safe food and many companies enjoy the benefits of this reputation by exporting and selling products to customers all over the world." However, Pierce also believes the work of FSIS inspectors and veterinarians is often overlooked, "Have you ever noticed that our work is mostly unrecognized by the general public?"

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Pierce takes opportunities to educate consumers about what FSIS does to ensure that the meat, poultry, egg and Siluriformes fish products they consume are safe, wholesome and correctly

labeled. Or, as Pierce says, “Making sure that people don’t have to think about the safety of their next bologna sandwich.”



Dr. Pierce is shown preparing the cecum of a market hog for taking a NARMS (National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System) program sample at a very small establishment where she had a dual role of PHV and FLS. Photo courtesy of Phillip Crouse II, OFO.

Sharing FSIS career opportunities with the students gives them additional options. During the break between classes, she often

has several students stay to discuss their goals and what career would be a good fit for them.

Outside of Work

She is married to Paul Pierce, Director of Regulatory Services with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Food Safety Division. They have a blended family of 4 children and 2 grandchildren. “These kids have grown up with food safety, considering what both Paul and I do.”

Not only is Pierce busy at work, but she also prefers to keep busy in her personal life. She enjoys outdoor activities such as training and riding her horse, riding motorcycles and snowmobiles, boating, fishing and going on nature walks. She also has a creative side and enjoys drawing, painting and cross-stitching. An active volunteer at her church, Pierce teaches catechism to middle schoolers and high schoolers, serves as lector and eucharistic minister, and helps with various construction or other projects around the church and rectory.

Outreach is also important to Pierce. “I remain active in the recruiting of veterinarians to FSIS by attending career fairs and lecturing about meat inspection to the third-year veterinary students at the University of Wisconsin’s School of Veterinary Medicine.”

Reminder to Protect Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

In response to the national emergency related to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), FSIS reminds employees of their duty to continue to protect personally identifiable information (PII) while teleworking. PII is information about an individual maintained by an agency, including any information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity. On March 31, FSIS released a set of guidelines to help employees proactively protect PII and how to report PII incidents (the unintentional or intentional loss of information; or unauthorized access, acquisition, modification or disclosure of PII information whether physical or electronic). Please take time to review the documents. It is up to each of us to ensure the safety and integrity of the agency’s mission. If you have any questions regarding the guidelines, email the Privacy mailbox at USDAPrivacy@ocio.usda.gov.

New Backup Dependent Care Program

The Emergency Backup Dependent Care (EBDC) program is now available to FSIS employees and their dependents. The EBDC program helps find and pay for backup care when regular child or adult care arrangements are disrupted, even at the last minute. Coverage is provided for dependent children or adults for whom employees are responsible. It also includes employee self-care due to illness or recovery from surgery. The program provides up to 20 visits per employee dependent, per fiscal year. Call the Federal Occupational Health national call center at (800) 222-0364 or log in to www.worklife4you.com (new user registration code: FSIS) to request assistance. Find more information at www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/informational/aboutfsis/audience-employees/dependentcare or contact the FSIS EAP & WorkLife Program at eap@usda.gov.

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
Ahmad, Safwat A., SVMO	Richmond, Va.	29	Ruddock Jr., Billy D., CSI	Monett, Mo.	37
Baylis, Phillip M., CSI	Hattiesburg, Miss.	28	Schauer, Kirk L., FI-PP	Howard Lake, Minn.	10
Bingham, Julie M., FI-S	De Queen, Ark.	39	Sides, Addie B., SVMO	Batesburg, S.C.	26
Collins, George D., CSI	Green Forest, Ark.	33	Smith, Dorothy P., CSI	Las Vegas, Nev.	16
Cooper, Eileen A., CSI	Dodge City, Kan.	26	Stewart, Dorothy B., Resource Mgmt Asst.	Ridgeland, Miss.	30
Crawford, Karen S., FI-S	Springdale, Ark.	25	Strand, Rebecca A., CSI	Carson City, Nev.	15
Green, Robert R., CSI	Canby, Ore.	31	Toledo, Jorge H., SVMO	Springdale, Ark.	30
Goulart, Manuel F., Comp. Invstgr	Stockton, Calif.	27	Whitney II, Eugene W., Supply & Sample Hand. Spec.	Athens, Ga.	22
Jackson, Linda D., CSI	Claxton, Ga.	31	Williams, David R., CSI	Pine Bluff, Ark.	28
Jain, Leena, Micrbiol	Athens, Ga.	22	Williams, Elizabeth D., FI-S	Forest, Miss.	13
Little, Jeffrey R., CSI	Pine Plains, N.Y.	17	Willnerd, Joel K., Senior Comp. Invstgr	Omaha, Neb.	36
Meyer, Rosalie R., Financial Tech.	Urbandale, Iowa	19	Zdunek, Zbigniew R., SVMO	Chattanooga, Tenn.	30
Morris, Donald R., CSI	Las Vegas, Nev.	32			
Osburn, Lyquiva R., SCSO	Claxton, Ga.	29			
Pankey, Mary J., CSI	Albertville, Ala.	34			

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Spotlight

research to improve detection and enumeration of *Salmonella* and other related issues. FSIS staff presented diverse topics and identified research needs about the safety of raw beef, raw pork, raw poultry and processed egg products, and cooked or cured meat and poultry; use of whole genome sequencing; antimicrobial resistance; and chemical contamination. ARS researchers provided an overview of their work that addressed these topics. Participants engaged in a roundtable discussion to identify next steps and other research needs.

This meeting was only one example of the ongoing partnership between FSIS and ARS, which in turn is only one aspect of ARS' wide-ranging work. In the decades since its formation, ARS research has helped improve crops and produce higher quality foods that are more resistant to pests and diseases. New breeds of animals produced greater quantities of lean meat per animal. ARS water management tools and technologies helped mitigate agricultural water consumption, and research-based farming practices reduced fertilizer runoff and other environmental impacts.

ARS invented technologies that made healthier food more available to the U.S. consumer. The agency became the trusted source for quality nutritional data to guide industry and U.S. policy.

Going forward, both agriculture as a whole and the FSIS food safety mission in particular are sure to benefit from partnering with ARS.

To learn more about ARS, visit their website at <https://www.ars.usda.gov/>.



RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

There are no recalls to report for the month of March.

For more information, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls.




FSIS Leadership Wants to Hear from You

FSIS employees work tirelessly to support our mission to protect the public by preventing foodborne illness. It takes all of us working together to achieve our goals.

Administrator Paul Kiecker encourages employees to send feedback, comments, concerns, ideas, stories of teamwork and more to FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

Your Feedback is Important

Send us comments and successes.

-  Resource sharing
-  Teamwork
-  Solutions



FSIS Employee Connections is an employee-centric publication that focuses on employees' off-duty activities, personal accomplishments and creativity. As a quarterly supplement to *The Beacon*, the *Connections* features the personalities that make up FSIS through employee profiles, inspiring community service and creative visual and literary works.

Send submissions for the Spring 2020 issue by April 15. Email submissions to FSISConnections@usda.gov. Photos should be high-resolution in .jpg format and sent as an attachment and include a detailed description of who is in the image (name, title and program area), what is taking place, the date and location it was taken, and the name, title and program area of the person who captured the image. Include approval from your supervisor. Provide a media consent form for individuals under 18 years of age. If you have questions or need the consent form, contact Laura Reiser at Laura.Reiser@usda.gov or (202) 720-7894, or Felicia Thompson at Felicia.Thompson@usda.gov or (202) 603-2150.

Employee Assistance Program

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and the Federal Occupational Health's (FOH) Worklife4You program are valuable tools in helping employees balance their work and home life and manage life issues as they arise. FSIS employees and their families may contact the EAP and Worklife4You, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for free and confidential assistance and referral services for help with relationship, family, emotional and alcohol or drug issues, to name a few. FOH offers several other services. Call 1-800-222-0364 (TTY: 1-888-262-7848) or go to www.FOH4you.com or www.worklife4you.com for more information.

- Adult Care and Aging
- Child Care and Parenting
- Education
- Financial and Legal Concerns
- Health and Wellness
- Prenatal Care and Adoption
- Relocation and Personal Support for Urgent Everyday Issues

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

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 USDA/FSIS, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Building 1, Room 2260, Mail Drop 5261, Beltsville, MD 20705. 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.