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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.

The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

September 2020



Pictured, from left: VFW Post 1503 Auxiliary Conductress Jan Kiecker, Commander Tom Levitt, Auxiliary President Kelli Levitt, Bingo Manager Betty Gimble and FSIS Administrator Kiecker. Photo courtesy of Paul Kiecker, OA.

When opportunities to educate consumers about FSIS and food safety arise, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured: far right) is ready. On Sept. 10, Kiecker visited Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1503 Dale City during their Bingo Night and handed out food safety education bags and materials to members. Kiecker and his wife regularly volunteer at VFW Post 1503.

Office of Food Safety Hosts First Women's Equality Day Town Hall for FSIS

By Felicia Thompson
Phone: (202) 603-2150

The Office of Food Safety (OFS) hosted a virtual Women's Equality Day Town Hall for FSIS employees commemorating the 100th anniversary of the official proclamation of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment prohibits states and the federal government from denying the right to vote to citizens of the United States based on sex.

The proclamation date of August 26 has been designated as Women's Equality Day: a day to remember the persistence of the many women who fought to ensure women's equal right to vote in the U.S. Constitution and for the broader principle of equality under the law for all.

Brief History of Women's Equality Day

Tisha Lighty-Cain, an Office of Field Operations (OFO) consumer safety inspector in the Philadelphia District and an FSIS Women's Special Emphasis

Program manager, opened the event by discussing the history and significance of Women's Equality Day. Said Lighty-Cain, "The 19th Amendment resulted from the initial efforts and activities that occurred in the early 1800s. The need for altering social conditions for women, combined with the idea of equality, led to the birth of the Women's Suffrage movement. At that time, women made half or less than half of their male counterparts, they could not inherit property or vote, and were denied many political rights."

She went on to describe how activists — such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell and many others — began making demands for equal rights. "Strong, conscientious, forward-thinking female leaders fought a long and hard battle to pave the way for the 19th Amendment."

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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.

Nov. issue – due Oct. 1 Dec. issue – due Nov. 1
Jan. issue – due Dec. 1 Feb. issue – due Jan. 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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Town Hall Round-Up

FSIS employee Town Halls are live phone conferences hosted by Agency leadership the fourth Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m., 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. Eastern Time. *The Beacon* will bring you highlights of the previous month's town hall. The next meeting is October 28. See page 8 for details.

August 26 Town Hall Highlights

Annual Leave Restoration

The Office of Personnel Management issued a new rule entitling employees whose work has been deemed "essential" to have excess annual leave restored without scheduling leave and having it denied. This applies to the current COVID-19 pandemic and future emergencies.

Egg Products Inspection Regulations Final Rule

FSIS would soon publish the rule, under which federally inspected egg product establishments would be required to develop and implement Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point systems and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that pathogens cannot be detected in finished egg products.

Questions from FSISFeedback@usda.gov

Question from an investigator in the Philadelphia District: "I have heard of physicians telling patients with COVID-19 that they can return to work after 72 hours fever free. What if they never had a fever? Shouldn't we require all employees coming back to work after a COVID-19 diagnosis to be tested again and have that test be negative?"

Response from Capt. Kis Robertson Hale, Deputy Administrator for the Office of Public Health Science and Chief Public Health Veterinarian: "When it comes to decisions like these, FSIS will continue to look to our federal partners at the CDC. They have the expertise in making public health recommendations to control diseases like COVID-19 and have been continually developing and updating guidance for situations like this. The most current recommendations from CDC for persons who test positive but never develop symptoms are to discontinue isolation 10 days after the date of their first positive test. CDC is no longer recommending testing to determine when to end isolation.

Question: "Even though the [face] shield and holder are only a few ounces in weight, that additional weight toward the front of the hardhat increases neck strain."

Response from Frank Mays, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Management: "We recognize that face shields might pose some inconveniences and require a period of adjustment. But they are necessary to provide in-plant personnel with the most protection possible during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Agency has in stock two different models of face shields: (1) ERB Safety Face Shields, FSIS-90, with carrier/adaptor, FSIS-90A, and (2) a new model, the Bullard Face Shield, FSIS-96, with brackets, FSIS-96-A. Employees should order alternate equipment to find the best styles and fit for your situation.

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Under Secretary's Column

This summer, I traveled to district offices and establishments across the country to meet with FSIS employees in the field. I have truly been moved by many of their stories and career journeys, about how they are striving for their personal goals and about the professional



Dr. Mindy Brashears

relationships they have forged. When I outlined my vision for 2020 earlier this year, I noted the importance of building relationships. I believe that every successful organization is built on a foundation of strong internal and external relationships. I've had a chance to observe — and to build — more of these relationships and to see the results of personal investment.

I met hardworking employees who shared stories about how they pursued additional training and education while working for the Agency. Many have then gone on to take advantage of the opportunities for advancement within FSIS and have moved up through field positions as they acquire additional knowledge and skills. Their stories show how FSIS can be a great place to build a career and the many paths that you can take toward new positions with responsibilities and job titles you might not have even thought possible.

I am also inspired by stories of dedicated and engaged employees who are still eager to come to work, even when faced with personal hardship or a medical challenge. These employees are supported by their coworkers, who are quick to cover shifts, donate leave and find other ways to support each other. These stories demonstrate the strong working relationships that exist in FSIS and how our employees care for one another.

I am continually impressed by the amazing and generous people that work for this Agency, and we are a stronger organization because of you and the relationships that you have built. I hope each of you recognize the importance of the work that you do in contributing to our food safety mission and saving lives. Secretary Sonny Perdue likes to emphasize that we are all part of one USDA family, and I'm proud of the way FSIS employees live that out every day.

Administrator's Column

Last month, I traveled to many establishments in Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota to visit with inspection personnel. I was reminded of the diverse environments where FSIS employees carry out our food safety mission — from buffalo, hog and poultry



Paul Kiecker

slaughter establishments to egg breaking facilities and warehouses conducting export and ID services. Each work location brings unique challenges to practicing the safety measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for preventing the spread of COVID-19. It's important that you implement the recommendations as practically as possible for your unique circumstance. This might mean you need to lift your face shield to be able to see to safely walk down stairs. We want you to do the best you can to protect yourself and those around you from COVID-19 in the most reasonable way possible.

Meeting with supervisors and employees in the establishments, I also noticed the impact our attitude has on how we cope with all the changes occurring. It's important to remember that our attitude affects not only ourselves, but those around us and our work environment. A positive attitude and open-minded approach can contribute to an entire team's success.

I also want to continue to emphasize the importance of communication. We have completed the rollout of electronic devices (e-Devices) to the Alameda, Atlanta, Dallas, Jackson, Raleigh and Springdale districts. As each employee receives their e-Device, we expect that you will use them to help stay up to date on the latest information from the Agency. The *Wednesday Newsline*, *The Beacon* and employee town hall meetings are all important sources of information about the resources and benefits that are available to you. Staying engaged and aware of this information will also help ensure you don't miss important opportunities or deadlines. Until I can make a trip to your establishment or office for an in-person visit, please continue to send us your questions and suggestions to FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

FSIS Deputy Administrator Terri Nintemann and OFS Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears followed Lighty-Cain and shared their professional journeys, and then responded to employee questions that had been submitted to the Under Secretary's email box, AskFSUS@usda.gov.

Nintemann: Change, Teamwork and Mentoring

Deputy Administrator Nintemann joined FSIS in 2003, having previously worked for a Senate committee and individual members of the Senate and House of Representatives. In the time Nintemann has been with FSIS, she worked in multiple program areas and observed significant changes over the years. During the event she recalled, "As a young woman right out of college, I quickly learned the importance of teamwork and being able to work across the aisle and across program areas. Teamwork requires more than just reaching consensus on a problem — it requires careful management of relationships and networks. I learned early on that women need to support one another within these networks."

Women can face a variety of obstacles during their professional careers, such as being underestimated due to gender, age or background. Nintemann experienced some of these hinderances herself and found ways to overcome them. She said, "For me, these experiences drove me to work harder — to be more prepared and better informed — until I was confident that I was doing the best job possible. I leaned on more experienced female colleagues, who offered mentorship and guidance, as I also watched them navigate difficult situations."

Nintemann noted that the Agency has made strides in diversifying its leadership and welcoming the contributions of women at all levels. "The percentage of Senior Executive Service positions at FSIS held by women is close to 50 percent. Seven of the ten FSIS program areas or offices are now led by women. In 2010, 4.5 percent of female employees were supervisors compared to 10 percent of male employees. Today, 6 percent of FSIS female employees are supervisors, compared to 8 percent of FSIS male employees," she said. "These numbers are a testament to the valuable contributions of women at FSIS. It's important that as an agency we continue to recognize women's achievements and make sure that our systems are promoting and rewarding them appropriately."

Brashears: Networking, Communicating and Resources

OFS Under Secretary Dr. Brashears followed. "As a female scientist who has spent her career in academia, and now in the federal government, these issues are very personal to me. Although I've always had a vested interest in agriculture and science, I didn't always have another woman to help nurture my interests or help me navigate my way in the workplace."

Her first position after college was as an extension food safety specialist and assistant professor in the University of Nebraska's Department of Food Science. She later became a professor of food

science at Texas Tech and within 12 years, was named the director of the International Center for Food Industry Excellence.

In her roles at Texas Tech, Dr. Brashears says she "had the opportunity to teach tomorrow's scientists and food safety advocates about food microbiology and food safety, and to mentor them over the years as they succeeded in their own careers. It feels good knowing that I had some part in helping them, but especially the women, to get there."

Committed to engaging, supporting and recognizing women at FSIS and their contributions to food safety, Dr. Brashears believes that women who join the FSIS workforce should have access to the support, mentorship and opportunities that will help them to strive.

"Women make up just under half — 47 percent — of the FSIS workforce, and this number has remained steady over the past three years. We've had success in the recent past recruiting women into positions within the workforce as food inspectors, consumer safety inspectors and public health veterinarians. Yet for many of these positions, women still make up a smaller percentage of FSIS' personnel than in comparable civilian positions across the country," said Dr. Brashears.

To find solutions to the unique demands placed on women, both at home and in the workplace, AskFSUS@usda.gov is available for all employees to communicate directly with Dr. Brashears about the challenges and concerns women are experiencing. Dr. Brashears stated, "I'm committed to working toward solutions to these issues, and I want employees to feel engaged in their work — to see how their daily contributions impact the Agency's mission — and to feel empowered to bring concerns forward and work through problems." Dr. Brashears concluded, "Women in science, agriculture and public health represent a growing community that will only expand as we continue to support one another and strengthen our skills, especially at FSIS."

Following Dr. Brashears' talk, she teamed up with Deputy Administrator Nintemann; Dr. Maria Esteras, Veterinary Recruiting and Outreach Coordinator in OFO; Jodi Hallstrom, an FSIS Employee Assistance Program manager in the Office of Management (OM); and three female members of the FSIS Management Council to respond to employees' questions that had been submitted to the Under Secretary's mailbox. The Management Council members who participated were the OM Deputy Assistant Administrator (AA) C. Natalie Lui Duncan, an OFO Executive Associate for Regulatory Operations Geraldine "Gerri" French, and Office of Employee Experience and Development's AA Dr. Soumaya Tohamy.

The topics included paid parental leave, women in positions of authority, training to combat sexism, restrooms and access to lactation facilities in the field, safety in the workplace, sexual harassment, pay gaps, and promotions for women of color.

Continued on page 5...

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
Benjamin, Dale A., CSI	Medford, Ore.	25	Pederson, Curtis G., Resource Mgr.	Lombard, Ill.	8
Bridges, Leslie K., SVMO	Evant, Texas	13	Perea, Andy, FI-S	Greeley, Colo.	16
Cole, Myron S., CSI	Memphis, Tenn.	32	Quezada, Sherry J., CSI	Canton, Ga.	29
Cotton, Gwen M., CSI	Center, Texas	13	Rodriguez, Enid, FI-S	Enterprise, Ala.	31
Espelund, Robert K., CSI	Butte, Mont.	18	Seals, Glenda L., FI-S	Canton, Miss.	23
Foley, Tammy A., CSI	Enterprise, Ala.	18	Sparrow, James W., SVMO	Enterprise, Ala.	16
Harper, Linnie M., IT Spec.	St. Louis, Mo.	38	Tate, Nancy L., CSI	Willmar, Minn.	24
Hiemenz, Joyce M., CSI	St. Cloud, Minn.	24	Taylor, Carolyn L., FI-S	Farmerville, La.	16
Holcomb, Floyd R., CSI	Houston, Texas	16	Thomas, Donald R., CSI	Como, Texas	38
Jacobsma, Darrell, CSI	Minneapolis, Minn.	34	Trent, Robert J., CSI	Greeley, Colo.	17
Johnson, Paul K., FI-S	Bay Springs, Miss.	25	Vazquez, Ida F., FI-S	Friona, Texas	7
McClendon, Ella W., FI-S	Sebastopol, Miss.	14	Watson, Brenda K., FI-S	Farmerville, La.	18
McCrary, Timothy J., FI-PP	Rembrandt, Iowa	41	Wai, Kit Li, IT Spec.	Washington, D.C.	23
McManess, William G., Supv. CSI	Green Bay, Wis.	22			
Patrick, Albert C., FI-S	Morton, Miss.	8			

...Continued from page 4

Women's Equality Day

Closing Remarks

FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker thanked all the speakers and the employees who submitted questions to the Under Secretary's mailbox and expressed why the program was important for all FSIS employees.

"Women's equality is something that matters to all of us," Kiecker said. "I am proud of the progress FSIS has made and we are committed to continuing to improve. At the end of the day, we are part of the same human family, imbued with dignity and worthy of respect. The work of ensuring equality is never done, and I will always strive to be an ally to my female colleagues. FSIS is committed to diversity and inclusion as well as an environment where employees and customers are treated fairly. It is important to care for yourself and not ignore mistreatment and injustice. Being part of a team means embracing what makes each member unique. I am very proud and thankful for the way our employees — whether field or headquarters, frontline or support — have always come together to do our jobs."

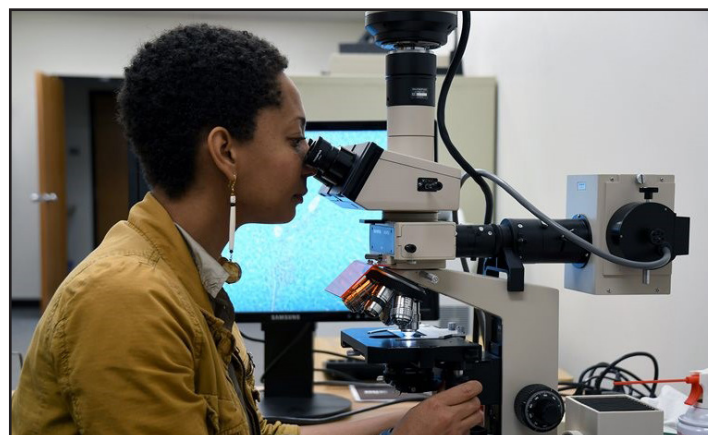
2020 i-Impact Video "Life of a Sample" to be Released this Fall

By Greg DiNapoli, OEED

Phone: (202) 725-6453

FSIS launched the i-Impact initiative in 2017 to draw a "line of sight" from our daily work activities to the food safety mission of FSIS. In that spirit, the Office of Employee Experience and Development (OEED) has been preparing a video, "Life of a Sample." While the FSIS sampling program is complex, its success rests on the work and dedication of each of us, no matter what our program area. OEED staff members recorded footage at establishments, labs and headquarters for the video, which demonstrates your impact on the FSIS sampling program.

Please watch for the announcement of the video's release. We think you will find it informative and engaging, and that it will help you better understand your role in one of the Agency's key food safety initiatives: the sampling program.



Dr. Erin Howey, Office of Public Health Science, in the Pathology section of the Eastern Laboratory in Athens, Ga., views a slide prepared from tissue sent to the lab. Photo by Jeffrey White, OEED.

SNAPSHOTS FROM

Souderton, Penn.

During their lunch break, inspection personnel at Est. M-1311, a beef slaughter and processing plant in Souderton, Pennsylvania, gather for a photo with Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears, Administrator Paul Kiecker and OFO Executive Associate for Regulatory Operations Geraldine French.



Pictured, front row, seated from left: Tina Anderson and Dr. Brashears. Pictured, second row, standing from left: Frank Tang, Timothy Arace, Ashlyn Parise, Tracee Arace and Susan Hoover. Pictured, back row, from left: Kiecker, French, Dr. Robert Munson, Dorothy Woods, Derek Turner, Agim Dogani, Philip McMahon and Walter Rorrer. Photo by Amie Pena, OFO.



Marshall, Minn.

On August 11, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left) and Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, right) visit Establishment (Est.) P-7669, a turkey slaughter plant in Marshall, Minnesota, and meet Consumer Safety Inspector Watashee Marlow (pictured, center). By wearing face coverings, the trio is adhering to one of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines and FSIS requirements to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Photo by Dr. Mark Johnson, OFO.

THE FIELD



Hatfield, Penn.

FSIS inspectors at Est. M-791, an export, meat slaughter/processing and poultry processing plant in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, with Dr. Brashears (pictured, first row, from left), OFO Executive Associate for Regulatory Operations Geraldine French and Kiecker (pictured, back row, center) gather with their protective gear, available to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Pictured, front row, from left: Dr. Brashears, French and Gary Hagenbuch. Pictured, back row, from left: Michael Levett, Daryl Peachey, David Yoder and Kiecker. Photo courtesy of OFO.



Pictured, from left: Frontline Supervisor Amie Pena, Kiecker, Dr. Brashears, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Safwat Gayed and French gathered with another group of inspection staff who are assigned at Est. 791 in Hatfield, Pennsylvania. Photo by Daryl Peachey, OFO.



After visiting Establishment G-21597, an egg processing plant near Esterville, Iowa, FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left) and Frontline Supervisor Dr. Jeffrey Enlow (pictured, back) visit Inspector Kevin Zitterich's (pictured, right) home to see his "pet cow." Photo courtesy of Paul Kiecker, OA.

POLICY UPDATES

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

- Notice 39-20, Limited Period for Changes to Existing Elections Under the Federal Flexible Spending Account
- Notice 40-20, Public Health Information System Export Module Enhancements
- Notice 41-20, 2020 Yearend Closing Instructions
- Directive 10,000.1, Policy on Use of Results from Non-FSIS Laboratories

Recent and Upcoming FSIS Meetings

Salmonella - State of the Science (Virtual Public Meeting)

Open to the public.

September 22, 9 a.m. - 3:15 p.m.

Transcripts and information will be available through the FSIS website at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/meetings>.

Employee Town Hall Meetings

Employees only.

October 28 at 9 a.m., 3 p.m. and 9 p.m., ET.

Submit questions to FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection (NACMPI)

Open to the public.

September 24, 9:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. and September 25, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

For more information, see the Federal Register Notice at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/08/21/2020-18389/national-advisory-scommittee-on-meat-and-poultry-inspection>. Registration is required and available online at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/meetings>.

Food Safety: Consumer Outreach and Education Today and for the Future (Virtual Public Meeting)

Open to the public.

October 6, 12 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

For more information, see the Aug. 28, 2020, issue of the Constituent Update at www.fsis.usda.gov/cu. Registration required online at <https://ems8.intellor.com/?do=register&t=1&p=831094>.

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

SAFETY CORNER

New Personal Protective Gear

FSIS Office of Management's Safety and Physical Security Branch is introducing three new personal protective gear items for mitigating heat stress. The following items can be ordered from the Materiel Management Service Center (MMSC):

- Cooling Hat Liner, FSIS-98
- Evaporative Cooling Hard Hat Pad, FSIS-99
- Evaporative Cooling Bandana, FSIS-100

All three items are activated by simply soaking them in water for two to five minutes. They remain hydrated for up to four hours. Soak again to reactivate.

Materiel Management Service Center

MMSC Contact Information:

6351 Ammendale Road

Beltsville, MD 20705

Phone: 1-877-576-6329 or (301) 394-0400

Fax: (301) 394-0300

Email: CFPDC@dm.usda.gov

Pathogen Profile: Staphylococcal Food Poisoning

By Spencer Pretectrum, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-1215

Even though we were unable to gather for our usual outdoor cookouts this summer, foodborne illness isn't going to let us off easy. Many lesser-known pathogens lurk on improperly stored or prepared items and it is always important to follow food safety recommendations. One pathogen to be aware of is *Staphylococcus aureus* (*Staph*). About 25 percent of people have *Staph* on their skin and in their noses. It usually does not cause illness in healthy people, but *Staph* can cause skin infections (especially if the skin is broken by a wound) and can also make toxins that can cause food poisoning. *Staph* food poisoning is a gastrointestinal illness caused by eating foods contaminated with toxins produced by the bacterium.



Image courtesy of CDC.

How do people get *Staph* foodborne illness?

People who carry *Staph* can contaminate food if they don't properly wash their hands before touching it. If food is contaminated with *Staph*, the bacteria can multiply in the food, which produce toxins that can make people ill. *Staph* bacteria are killed by cooking, but the toxins are not destroyed and can still cause illness. Foods that are not cooked after handling, such as sliced meats, pastries, and sandwiches, are risky especially if contaminated with *Staph*. Food contaminated with *Staph* toxin may not show any signs of spoilage, such as bad odor or off-putting appearance.

What are the symptoms of *Staph* food poisoning?

Staph food poisoning is characterized by a sudden start of nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea. Symptoms usually develop within 30 minutes to 8 hours after eating or

drinking an item containing *Staph* toxin and can last approximately a day. Severe illness is rare. The illness cannot be passed from one person to another. If you think you might have *Staph* food poisoning contact your health care provider.

How is *Staph* food poisoning treated?

The most important treatment is drinking plenty of fluids. Your healthcare provider may give you medicine to decrease vomiting and nausea. People with severe illness may require intravenous fluids. Antibiotics are not useful in treating this illness because the toxin is not affected by antibiotics.

How can I prevent *Staph* food poisoning?

Remember to always follow these food safety tips:

- Cook foods to their safe minimal internal temperature, measured by using a food thermometer.
- Keep hot foods hot (140 °F or hotter) and cold foods cold (40 °F or colder).
- Separate leftover cooked food into wide, shallow containers and refrigerate within 2 hours (or 1 hour if it's hotter than 90 °F in/outside).

The following tips which are part of the four steps to food safety — clean, separate, cook and chill — can also help protect you and your loved ones from food poisoning:

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before, during and after preparing food and before eating.
- Do not prepare food if you are ill with diarrhea or vomiting.
- Wear gloves while preparing food if you have wounds or infections on your hands or wrists.

Lisa Fort: Chemist and Modern Renaissance Woman

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

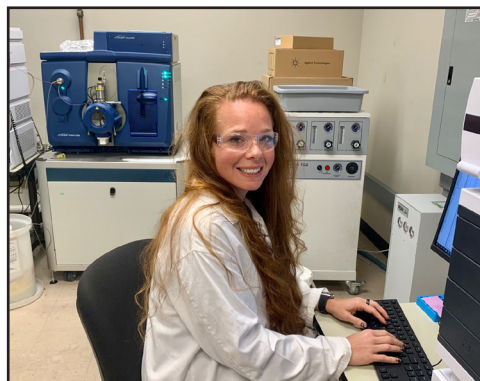
Lisa Fort is a chemist in FSIS' Midwestern laboratory in St. Louis, Missouri, where her duties include "bench work" — mixing and handling chemicals, extracting samples, and analyzing those samples using sophisticated instrumentation. She and her colleagues look for veterinary pharmaceuticals, such as penicillin, in meat. Some of her most important work has involved polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) that are extracted from muscle or plasma samples. PFAS are chemicals that can accumulate in animal and human tissues, with potential harmful effects.

Currently, the team is working on phase four of a PFAS project. This phase compares the tissues of many different species to demonstrate that all samples can be analyzed simultaneously instead of running separate tests for individual species. Fort has participated in every aspect of all four phases of this project. She helped build and validate the method, write the protocols, set up instrumentation, analyze samples, write reports and determine the levels of detection — not only for the two analytes (elements or compounds) originally requested — but for an additional 14 analytes.

How does this work with PFAS apply to food safety? Said Fort, "Cooking the meat will not kill those analytes, and they can accumulate in our bodies and potentially cause serious health conditions. Therefore, it is important that we collect and analyze meat samples for PFAS." Supervisory Chemist Dr. Ivan Lenov said, "This year, Lisa has collaboratively worked with other analysts on the extension of the PFAS method to multiple species as well as analyzing samples, helping the lab keep up with daily work while also expanding our analytical capacity. Her contributions to the PFAS program have embodied the FSIS mission of protecting the public health by ensuring food safety."

Money-Saving Initiative

Experience prepared Fort for her FSIS career in multiple ways. Prior to joining FSIS, she worked for a company that manufactures laboratory instruments and accessories. As a field engineer there, Fort visited multiple laboratories across the country and observed how they operated. When she joined FSIS, she was able to use this knowledge and experience to suggest improvements in the lab where she worked. If a micropipette (a device for the precise delivery of small volumes) was broken, the lab would dispose of it. Fort took the initiative to create a program to save replacement costs by returning many of these instruments to service in the laboratory. She cleans and repairs the pipettes, makes sure they are working properly and has taught others in the FSIS lab how to repair them, too.



Lisa Fort, a chemist in FSIS' Midwestern laboratory in St. Louis, Missouri, reviews a set of data for the newest PFAS project that was run on the SCIEX Triple Quad 6500+ System. Photo by chemist coworker Darren Montgomery.

Teamwork

Fort believes FSIS empowers her to be successful in protecting public health. "I get to participate in a total team environment that creates success by a huge group effort of knowledge and skills," she said. The team has many training

opportunities, including some initiated by Fort. She enlisted a distributor to come and teach the team how to troubleshoot and repair complex instruments. There are multiple volunteer groups, including a team that maintains instruments, a group that writes contracts and a team that reports data in the Laboratory Information Management System.

Fort describes her coworkers as "very knowledgeable and diverse in every way, with a variety of backgrounds. They are always willing to step in and help in any way they can. We have a very good dynamic and are all working toward the same common goal — putting out quality results so that we know if food is safe for human consumption."

A Day in the Lab

Some days, Fort may need to calibrate, troubleshoot or repair equipment, or she may be setting things up to run different analyses. Other days, she may extract samples from meat products and run them on one of the various instruments to test PFAS levels. Fort is most proud of work she has done related to PFAS — being a part of the project has expanded her horizons beyond the extraction and analysis of typical, everyday samples.

Transition to FSIS

After graduating with her bachelor's degree in chemistry from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), Fort worked a few temporary positions, then joined the company where she was a field engineer, which provided valuable access to multiple laboratories across the country. "This allowed me to see how

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different places operate, and I learned things that I would eventually use in my work at FSIS,” she said.

Two friends introduced Fort to FSIS and what the Agency does: one was a fellow student at SIUE who worked at FSIS while attending school, and the other was a friend who had a field engineering job who went on to work at the Agency. Fort was intrigued — it sounded like a place she could grow and make a bigger contribution to society.

Modern Renaissance Woman

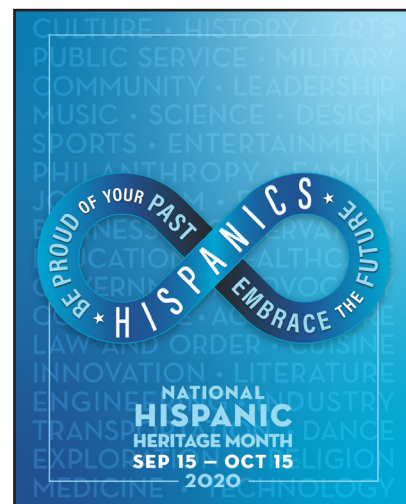
Fort enjoys teaching her 10-year-old daughter, Alaina, about food safety and has even explained the processes that take place with all the project work she has been doing. Said Fort, “Alaina thinks my job is very important and that being a chemist is one of the jobs she may do when she grows up. She also enjoys cooking a lot, so she may want to be a baker!”

National Hispanic Heritage Month

National Hispanic Heritage Month (NHHM) celebrates the histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Begun in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week under President Lyndon Johnson, the observation was expanded by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 to cover the 30-day period from September 15 to October 15. It was enacted into law on Aug. 17, 1988.

September 15 was selected as the start because it is the anniversary of independence for five Latin American countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Mexico and Chile commemorate their independence days during this period and Columbus Day (Día de la Raza) is October 12.

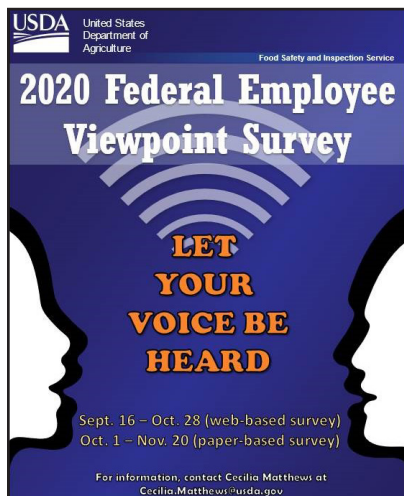
America’s fastest-growing ethnic group, Hispanics comprise approximately one-fifth of the U.S. population. Hispanic culture influences American music, food, art, literature, politics and other things. Plan to participate this year in one of the many NHHM celebrations planned all over the country.



2020 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Has Begun

By Cecilia Matthews, OEED

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The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) launched the 2020 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) to FSIS headquarters on September 16 with a web-based survey that closes October 28. The paper-based survey is open October 1 through November 20 for field employees. Your opinions are important to FSIS’ leadership team because your feedback helps the Agency gauge progress and determine areas for improvement. Please watch for the FEVS and take time to respond. We are looking forward to receiving your feedback.



RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

August 1	FSIS issued a public health alert due to a Texas establishment producing ready-to-eat beef and chicken taquitos and chimichangas that may contain possible foreign matter contamination. This product also contained Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulated diced green chilies that have been recalled by the producer.
August 5	FSIS issued a public health alert due to ready-to-eat meat and poultry products containing FDA regulated onions that have been recalled due to concerns that the products may be contaminated with <i>Salmonella</i> Newport.
August 7	FSIS issued a public health alert due to a Kentucky establishment producing sausage products that may be contaminated with <i>Listeria monocytogenes</i> .
August 10	A Nevada establishment recalled approximately 242,640 pounds of meat and poultry products due to misbranding and undeclared allergens. The products may contain milk, wheat, soy, peanuts or oysters; and may also contain MSG, sesame products or sulfites.
August 18	A Minnesota establishment recalled approximately 15,134 pounds of canned soup product due to misbranding and undeclared allergens. The product contains milk and soy, as well as beef and pork.
August 22	A Washington establishment recalled approximately 309 pounds of smoked sausage products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen. The product contains soy.
August 31	A Virginia establishment recalled approximately 1,202 pounds of ready-to-eat (RTE) chicken salad product due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen. The product may contain almonds, a known allergen, which are not declared on the product label.
For more information, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls .	

Emergency 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.

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 Winter 2020 issue by September 15. Email submissions to FSISConnections@usda.gov. Photos should be high-resolution in .jpg format. 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.

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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.