



The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

August 2020

Employees should continue to participate in all-employee town hall calls and look for timely information from their supervisors and the Wednesday Newslines.

Item Number	Item Names	Estimated Date Available
FSIS-98	Cooling Hat Liner	Ready for Order
FSIS-99	Evaporative Cooling Hard Hat Pad	Ready for Order
FSIS-100	Evaporative Cooling Bandana	September 8, 2020
FSIS-68	Neck Cooling Scarves (2 Pack)	Ready for Order
FSIS-69-FP	Sqwinchers, Fruit Punch Flavor (Box 50)	Ready for Order
FSIS-69-FP-SF	Sqwinchers, Sugar Free, Fruit Punch Flavor (Box 50)	Ready for Order
FSIS-69-LL	Sqwinchers, Lemon Lime Flavor (Box 50)	Ready for Order
FSIS-69-OR	Sqwinchers, Orange Flavor (Box 50)	Ready for Order
FSIS-69-OR-SF	Sqwinchers, Sugar Free, Orange Flavor (Box 50)	Ready for Order

Order Codes for Heat Stress Prevention Items

The items listed are available to order using the accompanying Item Numbers. For updates on products and their availability, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/HeatStressIllnessPreventionItems. An eAuthentication account is not required.

New USDA Performance Management System and Updated Awards Program for FY21

By Kimberly Berkeley, OM

Phone: (202) 690-0428

USDA has established a new two-tier performance system for all USDA agencies, effective October 1, 2020, the start of the fiscal year (FY) 2021 rating cycle. The change also introduces an updated accomplishments-based awards program, also effective October 1, 2020, focused on employee contributions to USDA's mission rather than end-of-the-year ratings. These changes come from the recently revised [Departmental Regulation 4040-430, Employee Performance and Awards](http://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departamental-regulation-4040-430) (www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departamental-regulation-4040-430).

Employees will be given training on the new performance management system and awards program and will need to complete it by September 30, 2020. Training is available as a webinar, "OHRM Performance and Awards Policy," or paper-based for those without online access, "New USDA Performance and Awards Policies – Paper-Based."

Below are some pieces of key information regarding the new system.

Highlights of the New Performance System

- Will be a two-tier rating system allowing for only summary ratings of "Fully Successful" for "Unacceptable."
- All performance elements will be critical, and each element will be rated as "Fully Successful" or "Does Not Meet Fully Successful."
- A rating narrative will be required in two circumstances: (1) when an element is rated "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" or (2) when an element is rated Fully Successful, even though, due to circumstances outside of the employee's control, all the goals in that element

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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.



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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.

Oct. issue – due Sep. 1 Nov. issue – due Oct. 1
Dec. issue – due Nov. 1 Jan. issue – due Dec. 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

OFO's Executive Associates

Felicia Thompson, OPACE

Phone: (202) 603-2150

FSIS owes its ability to run like a well-oiled machine to its diverse workforce. Each employee brings his or her own set of skills to the table, which enables the Agency to fulfill its mission— ensuring meat, poultry and egg products remain safe, wholesome and properly labeled.

Approximately 8,600 employees, including about 7,500 in-plant personnel and others in the Office of Field Operations (OFO), work collectively to conduct a broad range of food safety activities to achieve FSIS' overall vision — ensuring everyone's food is safe. This dedicated team is considered the "boots on the ground" because they are the ones that make sure that more than 6,000 geographically dispersed establishments, divided into 10 districts, are slaughtering livestock humanely and are producing safe food.

Understandably, managing a team of this size requires coordination, planning and two- (or more) way communication. Playing a key role in keeping those lines of communication open are OFO's Executive Associates for Regulatory Operations (EARO).

Geraldine "Gerri" French, Paul Wolseley, Robert Bane and Michael Watts are the Agency's EAROs or liaisons that ensure FSIS' front-line employees and the Agency's many stakeholders are on the same page and aware of new or existing policies and high-level decisions that enable the Agency to modernize. This is no small task as each of these entities represents a very important spoke on the wheel that requires FSIS' attention.

This month, we introduce Gerri French and Paul Wolseley. Readers will learn how their skills and experiences contribute to their current roles as EAROs and how their efforts impact the Agency's mission and vision. In September's issue, we will introduce Robert Bane and Michael Watts.

Meet Geraldine "Gerri" French

Gerri French was appointed as EARO in May 2020 after serving in an acting capacity. In this role, French is responsible for supporting the OFO district offices located in Springdale, Jackson and Philadelphia, which includes approximately 2,100 employees in 15 states.

The position requires her to use her knowledge of the Agency's various program areas — and her skills at leading teams — in a more direct role supporting inspection operations. French appreciated this opportunity to make a difference by contributing to the Agency's success in a different capacity.

Much of French's understanding of how many parts of FSIS work comes from personal experience, which has also honed her communication and management abilities. In the two decades that French has been with

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Under Secretary's Column

The COVID-19 public health crisis has highlighted the importance of the work that FSIS does — ensuring the safety of the food supply. I cannot express enough my gratitude and appreciation for the dedicated staff we have across the country. This month, I want to specifically call out and



Dr. Mindy Brashears

thank the FSIS laboratory personnel in the Office of Public Health Science (OPHS). All three FSIS laboratories — Athens, Georgia; Albany, California; and St. Louis, Missouri — remain operational during the COVID-19 pandemic to test food safety samples and identify and characterize bacteria in food samples.

Just as our in-plant personnel continue to rise to meet the challenges of COVID-19, our laboratory personnel have pulled together as a team to demonstrate their resourcefulness and resilience. Employees relocated offices to conference rooms, physically spaced out analytic equipment, implemented flexible work schedules and altered workflows — all to maintain social distancing. In the early days of the pandemic, when supplies and resources were still scarce, laboratory staff from all locations worked together to find and buy safety supplies, such as hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, gloves and face shields. Staff and their family members also stepped up to sew cloth face coverings for their coworkers.

It is critical that the laboratories can continue to function, even if a large proportion of staff are affected by illness or quarantine. About 30 laboratory staff members volunteered to train 34 volunteers in methods to support lab work if needed. The volunteers are from the Office of Policy and Program Development; from OPHS' Laboratory Quality Assurance Staff, Food Emergency Response Network Staff, and the Executive Associate for Laboratory Services Staff; as well as technicians from the Agricultural Research Service.

Our laboratory personnel continue to demonstrate amazing dedication to their vital role of supporting in-plant personnel and producing essential test results. I'm so proud of the flexibility of our employees, as well as a willingness to find new ways to accomplish our mission and support one another as one FSIS team.

Administrator's Column

There is no doubt that 2020 has challenged us in ways we could not have anticipated. While so many aspects of our lives may seem out of our control, we always have the power to choose how we respond to these obstacles — we can still control our attitude and the actions that we take.



Paul Kiecker

I am continually impressed by the ways that FSIS employees respond to unexpected challenges.

Recently, the organizers of the 2020 Feds Feed Families (FFF) campaign were asked to modify the campaign to an entirely virtual platform in response to COVID-19. The FFF volunteers showed remarkable ingenuity and creativity in developing an online hub for campaign activity and new ways to connect and engage employees with their communities. In the same way, FSIS employees adapted to this new format and found ways to participate and contribute. While we might have missed seeing collection boxes full of cans and boxes of food or attending a can-raising event, we could watch the donations climb on the FFF Hub Results Dashboard (fedsfeedfamilies.ocio.usda.gov/). At the conclusion of the formal campaign on July 31, FSIS employees had donated 123,880 pounds of food, 2nd among USDA agencies. The generosity and enthusiasm of our staff for this important annual campaign continued to shine through.

Although the push for the Feds Feed Families campaign occurs every summer, the campaign never really ends. The FFF hub will remain active throughout the year, so employees can continue to find resources and information on how to continue helping families in need. I hope the summer campaign has helped us remain connected with our communities and find ways we can contribute every day. In the same way, I hope that with the traits that we are exhibiting during COVID-19 — flexibility, resilience and positive thinking — will become characteristics we continue to display in our personal and professional lives.

As we head into the end of summer, I realize that for many of us, taking a vacation may look a little different this year. I

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may not have been met.

- Quarterly Progress Reviews will be identified as “Quarterly Conversations” to underscore the objective of ensuring the communication between the Rating Official and employee is frequent and ongoing.
- Demonstration Opportunities (formerly referred to as Performance Improvement Plans) can end prior to 30 days if the employee fails the Demonstration Opportunity before the full performance period ends.
- Within Grade Increases (WGI) may not be granted automatically, for example — the employee’s rating of record is not Fully Successful at the time of WGI eligibility).

Highlights of the Awards Policy Changes

- Due to the two-tier performance appraisal system, USDA will no longer use end-of-year rating-based awards. *Note that rating-based awards will still be permitted for FY20 ratings, because they will be based on the FY20 five-tier summary rating system.*
- Non-rating-based awards will be “Achievement Awards,” which will include more than one type of award. Spot Awards will no longer be in the program. Employees will be eligible for monetary and/or time-off Achievement Awards

(i.e., non-rating-based) to recognize specific or individual accomplishments that exceed normal job requirements.

- To be eligible for monetary or time-off awards (TOA), the employee will need a rating of record at that time of Fully Successful. Additionally, an employee placed on leave restriction within the 52 weeks prior to the award effective date will not be eligible for a TOA.
- Instead of TOAs expiring after 26 pay periods, employees will be able to carry over 80 hours of TOAs at the end of each calendar year. Any balance over 80 hours will be forfeited.
- If an employee moves to another USDA agency, full TOA amounts will be allowed to transfer. Agencies will be permitted to honor up to 40 hours of existing TOAs for employees transferring to USDA from other federal departments.
- The waiting period between Quality Step Increases (QSI) will be increased from 52 weeks to 104 weeks. A QSI will require 18 months of sustained performance excellence in the same grade and type of position, which requires that the employee be at the full performance level (highest grade of a career ladder) of their position.

If you have any questions, please email

PerformanceManagement@usda.gov.

COVID-19 Information for You

By Laura Reiser, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-7894

Each month, *The Beacon* continues to bring you questions and answers from the FSISFeedback@usda.gov email and reminders and updates the COVID-19 related issues. You will also continue to see information in the *Wednesday Newslines*, email user notices and the all-employee town hall meetings. Beginning in August, the **town hall meetings will be held monthly**, on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Three times will still be offered on Town Hall day: 9 a.m., 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. Eastern Time. The next meeting is September 23. Meetings will include any topic, not just pandemic-related announcements or concerns. Though the FSIS Feedback email box is receiving fewer emails, employees are encouraged to submit questions, concerns or suggestions for any work-related topic.

Return to Work Sites

FSIS in-plant personnel (IPP) are unique because they work in **regulated establishments** — not federally controlled and operated buildings. On May 22, the Agency provided return-to-work guidance for field employees who work in regulated establishments and had self-certified as being at higher risk for severe COVID-19 infection. If an employee believes that special

protective equipment is needed to return to work or that other precautions should be in place before they return, they should use the reasonable accommodation process to make a request.

The USDA Reopening Playbook is for reopening **USDA facilities** closed due to COVID-19. It includes how agencies should bring employees back to work at those sites. For FSIS, this is primarily employees in offices at USDA-owned or -leased facilities. Local pandemic coordinators will lead in determining the appropriate phase for each FSIS facility. If employees believe they need special protective equipment to return to work or that telework should continue, they should talk with their supervisor and consider using the reasonable accommodation process.

More information about the Agency’s **reasonable accommodation** program and access to forms is at ohrportal.fsis.usda.gov/services/reasonable-accommodation-program/ (an eAuthentication account is required). You can also request information and request and submit forms by emailing ReasonableAccommodations@usda.gov.

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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
Bastian, Kathleen M., FI-S	Springfield, Ore.	31	McCann, Ira C., FI-S	Bay Springs, Miss.	22
Bennett, Paul A., CSI	Denver, Colo.	25	Mendez, Richard G., CSI	Fremont, Neb.	36
DeVine, Wesley E., CSI	Delta, Colo.	26	Merrill, Daniel L., CSO	Missoula, Mont.	35
Dionne, Michael A., CI	Oak Park, Mich.	24	Myers, Barbara A., CSI	Kansas City, Mo.	19
Dubois, Katherine D., CSI	South West City, Mo.	14	Nelson, Divard, FI-S	Enterprise, Ala.	30
Eckrote, Ronald P., FI-S	Bay Springs, Miss.	14	Nicks, Sylvia A., FI-S	Morton, Miss.	22
Fernandez, Antonio A., FI-S	Fresno, Calif.	17	Paschal, Cynthia M., FI-S	Ashland, Ala.	25
Frost, Terry L., CSI	Danville, Ark.	31	Renfroe, Nancy, CSI	Union Springs, Ala.	39
Gardner, Dennis D., VMO	Dodge City, Kan.	34	Rinaldi, Eve E., Supv. CSI	Dodge City, Kan.	16
Gore, Melvin T., SVM	Delta, Colo.	30	Scroggs, Roger G., CSI	Rogers, Ark.	36
Holmes, Genene G., CSI	Sanger, Calif.	15	Smith, Linda R., FI-S	Ashland, Ala.	11
Jackson, Carnell, CSI	Vernon, Calif.	42	Thompson, James D., CSI	Chattanooga, Tenn.	30
Johnson, Catherine M., HR Asst.	Minneapolis, Minn.	5	Wai, Kit Li, IT Spec.	Washington, D.C.	23

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Administrator's Column

know many of us delayed or postponed vacation plans, whether due to travel restrictions or extra precautions given the current situation. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to use some vacation time, even if you opt for a "staycation," to mentally and physically recharge away from the workplace. I recently spent a week away from the office and was reminded just how necessary it is to step back and take that time to rest and clear your head. I returned to work ready to re-engage in our food safety mission. If you were planning vacation time this summer, you might consider continuing as planned, even if your destination is your own backyard. There's so much benefit to stepping away for a bit and recharging. Thank you for your continued dedication to our food safety mission.

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COVID-19 Information

Leave

To date, the Office of Personnel Management has not provided an update on raising the **leave ceiling** from 240 hours, as requested across federal agencies. Employees should continue to take their scheduled annual leave to avoid the possibility of losing annual leave at the end of the leave year, January 2, 2021. Agencies may **restore** forfeited annual leave because of "exigency of the public business." This is when there is a pressing need for an employee's service and an agency must cancel the employee's pre-approved annual leave because there are no other practical alternatives to accomplish the work by a given deadline. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management determined that COVID-19 represents an exigency of the public business and applies if *FSIS* cancelled any employee's annual leave due to COVID-19. If an *employee* cancels previously scheduled annual leave or does not schedule because their plans were canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions, an exigency of the public would *not* apply and not qualify for leave restoration.

Protective Equipment and Supplies

Question: "Some IPP have noted that it is impossible to use **helmet-mounted earmuffs** and the face shields that mount to the helmets. Some cannot use earplugs because they are prone to ear infections and need earmuffs. Is there a mount that allows

simultaneous attachment of the shield and earmuffs?" from a DVM in the Atlanta District.

Answer: Employees should contact their FSIS safety and health specialist for guidance on the proper equipment to order. They can also work with their supervisors to request a reasonable accommodation to purchase the style or type of hearing protection needed.

Question: "The **face shields** that mount to the helmet have helped eliminate many fogging problems, but I hear most frequently about **glare**. It interferes with certain activities, especially looking for small details like fecal contamination. Will we still require face shields, even when they hinder inspection capabilities?" from a supervisor in the Atlanta District.

Answer: Face shields may pose inconveniences and may require an adjustment period, but it is necessary to provide IPP the most protection possible. IPP may try slightly adjusting where they stand or make changes in lighting. They may try other face shield models available from an establishment where assigned and the two models from the Material Management Service Center (MMSC).

SNAPSHOTS FROM

Long Prairie, Minn.

In-plant personnel at Est. M-253, a beef slaughter plant in Long Prairie, Minnesota, gather for a photo during Office of Food Safety Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears' (pictured, front row, left) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker's (pictured, back row, left) visit on August 11. During the visit, employees spoke with Dr. Brashears and Kiecker about employee issues such as personal protective gear, locality pay and new cooling equipment to mitigate heat stress.



Pictured, front row, from left: Dr. Brashears, Tim Soule, Sarah Stockfleth, Laurence Rosete, Judy Primus, Ralph Schlosser and Joey Bauer. Pictured, back row, from left: Kiecker, Jon Legatt, Aaron Stanoch, Nestor Argueta and Drew Bartell. Photo by Alicia Holmquist, OFO.



Pictured, front row, from left: Dr. Brashears, Klay Blay, Bhim Chhetri, Eaiti Subba and Shaneka Youngblood. Pictured, second row, from left: Kiecker, Om Chhetri, Rafael Soria Luna, Dr. David Carroll and Ryan Olson. Photo by Betty McCann, OFO.

Worthington, Minn.

On another of their August tour stops, Dr. Brashears (pictured, front row, left) and Kiecker (pictured, second row, left) visited with inspectors assigned to Est. M-3W, a pork plant in Worthington, Minnesota, on August 11. Dr. Brashears and Kiecker spoke with inspectors to hear about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, among other topics.

THE FIELD



Lindstrom, Minn.

Consumer Safety Inspector Betty McCann, stationed at Est. M-17410/P-17410/V-17410 in Lindstrom, Minnesota, (pictured, center) showed Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left), and Office of Food Safety Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, right) around several plants on Kiecker's and Brashears' August tour. The week of August 11, they visited plants in Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota. Photo by Alicia Holmquist, OFO.

"I want to thank Ms. McCann for facilitating an excellent visit and for graciously assisting with line positions to make it possible for Dr. Brashears and me to visit with as many FSIS employees as possible," said Administrator Kiecker.

Long Prairie, Minn.

After visiting with the team from Est. 253 (pictured, from left) Kiecker, Alicia Holmquist and Dr. Brashears gather for a photo. Photo by Ralph Schlosser, OFO.



POLICY UPDATES

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

- Notice 36-20, Verification of Establishment Processes for Collecting Livestock Blood for Human Food
- Notice 37-20, Posting of Informational Dashboard Specific to FSIS Directive 10,010.1
- Notice 38-20, Completion of the Public Health Information System Establishment Profile Canning Questionnaire
- Directive 1090.1, Internal Control System - Revision 4
- Directive 1230.1, FSIS Issuance System - Revision 1
- Directive 10,010.2, Verification Activities for Shiga Toxin-Producing *Escherichia Coli* (STEC) in Raw Beef Products - Revision 1

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Spotlight

FSIS, she has served in a variety of roles to include her most recent – director of the Audit Liaison and Financial Analysis Division within the Office of the Chief Financial Officer. She managed a multi-disciplinary team that focused on cost analysis, internal controls over financial reporting, and audit liaison activities with the



Gerri French, EARO.

USDA Office of the Inspector General and the U.S. Government Accountability Office. In these positions, French gained the technical knowledge and “soft skills” she uses on a daily basis as an EARO.

French had the good fortune of working in several FSIS program areas, which afforded her the ability to learn the functions of a variety of staffs and to foster and maintain relationships with key staff, managers and executive leaders. All of which positions her to support the districts and field personnel, providing the information, resources and guidance they need to do their jobs and support the mission of the Agency effectively and efficiently.

Some of French's achievements include directing and overseeing multiple evaluation and survey efforts focused on assessments of organizational effectiveness that ensured the highest levels of service to the American people and for the safety of the nation's food supply. She was also instrumental in helping the Agency develop and adopt innovative approaches to how it evaluates itself and makes data-driven operational decisions.

French joined FSIS in November 2000 as a program analyst and has also worked in the Office of Policy and Program Development and the Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit. In both positions, she oversaw development of study designs, data analyses and reporting.

Meet Paul Wolseley

Paul Wolseley was appointed an EARO in May 2020, after serving in an acting capacity. Some of Wolseley's responsibilities include providing support and being the go-to person for questions or concerns from the OFO district offices located in Alameda, Dallas and Denver.

Wolseley accepted this role because he loves the mission of the Agency and wanted the opportunity to contribute to its success at a higher level. He also understood the challenges and wanted to make a difference among the many groups FSIS partners with.



Paul Wolseley, EARO.

Wolseley started as a poultry slaughter inspector and moved through the ranks to become the manager of the Chicago District in his 36 years with FSIS. During his tenure with FSIS, he pilot-tested the job of frontline supervisor (FLS) and served as the Agency's first FLS in a Chicago metropolitan circuit, where he provided oversight to 56 processing and import establishments and a lamb/goat/sheep slaughter establishment. These, and other positions, have contributed to Wolseley's latest success as an EARO, because of the institutional knowledge and experience each position added to his tool bag. He uses these tools to better understand the challenges employees face and what they need to be successful.

Wolseley is a graduate of Purdue University and holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Agriculture.

Professionalism in the Workplace

Professionalism can have different meanings depending on the situation or work environment. Merriam-Webster defines professionalism as “the skill, good judgment and polite behavior that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well.” Professionalism is key to effectively and efficiently fulfilling an organization’s mission.

On the other hand, there are also what can be called unprofessional behaviors. Most people notice and react badly to them, including when the person engaging in them might not realize how those behaviors are being perceived. According to management consultant Hank Boyer, some unprofessional behaviors to avoid include:

- Arriving or delivering assignments late.
- Displaying a sense of entitlement.
- Having a poor work ethic, including not focusing on the work and being too casual.
- Gossiping.
- Not accepting or implementing feedback and resisting direction.
- Conducting personal business at work, including texting, social media, emails and personal calls.
- Lacking humility.

You can also embrace professionalism in ways such as:

- **Appearance:** Meet or exceed the requirements of your organization’s dress code.
- **Behavior:** Strive to exceed the behavioral standards (e.g., code of conduct) in your organization, including showing genuine respect towards others.
- **Work Culture:** Learn the culture as quickly as possible; ask questions if you are unsure.
- **Communication:** Pay close attention to words, spelling and pronunciation. Ensure that your written and spoken communication, both of which are FSIS leadership competencies, follow the standards appropriate for each audience.
- **Responsibility:** Take full responsibility for your actions, words and behavior; be willingly accountable; and avoid making excuses.

Professionalism will help you be successful — in completing your assigned tasks, personal satisfaction at work, how you are evaluated, your career goals and contributing to the Agency’s mission of preventing foodborne illness and protecting public health.

Pathogen Profile: *E. coli*

By Spencer Pretectrum, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-1215

Despite many of us having to forgo spring, summer, Memorial Day and Labor Day cookouts and picnics, and fall tailgating, we still need to be mindful of dangerous foodborne pathogens in improperly stored or prepared food. One particularly unpleasant pathogen, *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), helped start modern food safety regulation as a result of an outbreak associated with fast food in the early 1990s.



Image courtesy of CDC.

Some kinds of *E. coli* cause illness by making a toxin called Shiga toxin. The bacteria that make these toxins are called “Shiga toxin-producing” *E. coli*, or STEC for short. The most commonly identified STEC in North America is *E. coli* O157:H7 (often shortened to *E. coli* O157 or even just “O157”). When you hear news reports about outbreaks of “*E. coli* infections,” they are usually talking about *E. coli* O157.

People of any age can become infected. Very young children and the elderly are more likely to develop severe illness than others, but even healthy older children and young adults can become seriously ill.

What are the symptoms of STEC infections?

The symptoms of STEC infections vary for each person but often include severe stomach cramps, diarrhea (often bloody), and vomiting. If there is fever, it usually is not very high (less than 101°F). Most people get better in 5 to 7 days. Some infections are very mild, but others are severe or even life-threatening.

How can STEC infections be prevented?

- **Wash your hands thoroughly** after using the bathroom or changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. Wash your hands after contact with animals or their environments (at farms, petting zoos, fairs and even your own backyard).
- **Cook meats thoroughly.** Ground beef and meat that has

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Cristina Picazo's Hard Work Pays Off

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

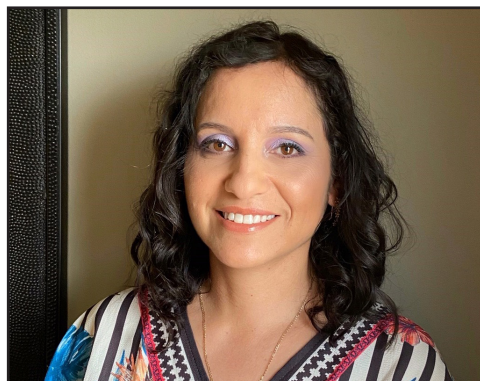
Maria Cristina Picazo is on the move — to Wichita, Kansas, to be exact. A consumer safety inspector (CSI) at an establishment in Holcomb, Kansas, Picazo applied for and was promoted to enforcement, investigations and analysis officer (EIAO) in March 2020. After training, she will make the move to begin her new position in Wichita. This has been a noteworthy year for Picazo — in addition to her promotion, she earned an associate degree in animal science, as well as food safety and food production certificates at Garden City Community College (GCCC) in Garden City, Kansas. Through FSIS' Continuing Education Program (CEP), the Agency reimbursed her for courses related to food safety, food science and animal science. While working full time throughout her coursework, she made the GCCC President's Honor Roll for achieving a grade point average of 4.0.

Her A-shift supervisor, Dr. Camilo Potes, said, "I have known Ms. Cristina Picazo for almost three years during which time she worked with me as a CSI, and I have been consistently impressed with her attitude and productivity. Cristina is both very bright and quite motivated. She is also a quick learner and has shown the ability to digest large volumes of information and to articulate information and ideas. I am confident that she will devote herself with a high degree of diligence and success to her new role as an EIAO."

Picazo's Career Track

Picazo began her FSIS career as a food inspector in 2003. She earned her promotion to CSI in 2007, where she conducts inspection verification activities of beef products to ensure establishments comply with the Federal Meat Inspection Act. These verification activities consist of performing direct observations and records review of the establishment's implementation of their written hazard analysis and critical control point program, standard operating procedures, sanitation performance standards and all other food safety programs. She also conducts humane handling, ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections, and performs export verification and sampling of products. Said Picazo, "I get a tremendous amount of fulfillment and satisfaction knowing that every day I protect the health of consumers, the welfare of animals and the nation's food supply chain."

Picazo's B-shift supervisor, Dr. Kevin J. Lavelle, describes her as "an extremely hard worker. She is excellent in the performance of her responsibilities and is very knowledgeable of the regulations and directives. Cristina applies this knowledge proficiently in the presence of deficiencies she finds on her patrols of the establishment. She possesses the ability to interact with the establishment management and personnel professionally and



Maria Cristina Picazo, consumer safety inspector in Holcomb, Kansas. Photo courtesy of Maria Cristina Picazo.

communicate her concerns to the veterinary medical officer promptly, succinctly and accurately. Most importantly, Cristina is a team player and always does her best to contribute to the fulfillment of the Agency's mission."

Picazo believes

FSIS fosters success: "FSIS empowers me to be successful through many training opportunities where I have gained extensive knowledge to successfully execute my duties. I currently participate in FSIS mentoring programs where I contribute as both mentor and mentee." Her mentor encouraged her to pursue the EIAO position. She also mentors food inspectors who are interested in a CSI position; to date, seven of her mentees have applied for and earned promotions to CSIs.

Prior to working at FSIS, Picazo was a quality assurance supervisor for a large beef plant. The position helped her understand food safety concepts and the importance of ensuring that food products are produced in a wholesome manner. A CSI at the plant discussed FSIS opportunities with her. She decided to apply for a job with the Agency because she had always been interested in food safety and wanted to be part of the FSIS team. More recently, a mentor in the Springdale District mentoring program helped Picazo understand the role and duties of an EIAO, which ultimately led to her new role with the Agency. Picazo advises anyone with a passion for food safety to consider a career with FSIS, and added, "I would advise them to prepare themselves for a wonderful career."

Paying it Forward

Picazo enjoys running, listening to music and volunteering her time. An avid advocate of the Continuing Education Program, she has written articles about the program for the district newsletter. As a member of the Springdale District Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee, she has volunteered to make presentations about CEP to fellow FSIS employees. She has also assisted the Springdale District with several recruiting events. In addition to mentoring food inspectors, she has tutored others continuing their education and assisted with several resume

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writing classes for FSIS inspectors in the southwestern Kansas area.

Picazo is married with five children: Cristina, Leopoldo, Priscila, and twins Brianna and Britney. Also employed by FSIS for over twelve years, her husband Armando Picazo is a CSI in Holcomb, Kansas. It's no surprise the couple have taught their children about food safety — how to read labels, check expiration dates on food products and measure the internal temperature of foods when cooking.

Website Modernization Efforts

By Shayla Mae Bailey, OPACE

Phone: (202) 604-0047

Historically, government websites have a reputation for giving very little thought to how the average user thinks and what they are trying to accomplish. But positive change is coming. Across the federal government, agencies and departments are now being asked to modernize their digital tools and websites with an emphasis on understanding and meeting user needs. The strategies and steps for this modernization are outlined in the United States Web Design System (USWDS).

The USWDS focuses on providing standard code for federal websites, enabling them to implement modern practices in a stable and accessible way. This means that those with disabilities, different browsers or different devices will all be able use these federal websites and have comparable experiences across the board. The new FSIS website will be in line with broader federal efforts to modernize digital services.

Shift to User-Focused Design

The current FSIS website reflects more of an “organizational chart” approach to some high-value areas of our information and a “filing cabinet approach” to other areas. It does not fully consider the priorities of our users or the audiences it serves. The new site will put users’ needs first, while taking into consideration the Agency’s goals and priorities for each stakeholder group.

Employ Modern Design and Strategy

The new FSIS site will use a combination of information prioritization, color and typography to maximize the user’s ability to find information quickly and reliably across the site. The current site also does not follow the USWDS and fails on some key aspects of usability and accessibility. The new site will follow USWDS 1.0 fully and 2.0 whenever possible, as well as following the USDA Digital Strategy Playbook.

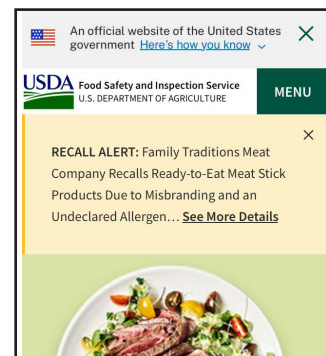
For page content, the Agency will employ a “bite-snack-meal approach,” ensuring that key information is easily discernable and digestible for all audiences. The site will also use plain language to ensure understanding across all audiences.

Move to a Cloud-Based Application

The new site will be built on Drupal 8, a powerful web content management system, which requires new system architecture and is perfectly suited for being hosted in the cloud, a centralized and secure way to store and share applications, data and IT services. The Agency has a goal to move all systems into the cloud, which is also part of a larger federal effort to modernize IT systems.

Expected to launch this fall, the new FSIS website will be a big change — for the Agency, its employees and website users. It will provide a stronger foundation for FSIS’ online services, enabling the Agency to better meet the needs of the people and organizations it serves.

To learn more about the USWDS visit: designsystem.digital.gov. To learn about USDA’s Digital Service Playbook visit: www.usda.gov/digital-strategy.



The mobile view image shows an example of the Recall Alert banner, a new component of the new FSIS website.

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been needle-tenderized should be cooked to a temperature of at least 160 °F as measured by a food thermometer. Color is not a reliable indicator of “doneness.”

- **Avoid raw milk**, unpasteurized dairy products, and unpasteurized juices (like fresh apple cider).
- **Avoid swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes,**

Pathogen Profile

ponds, streams, swimming pools and backyard “kiddie” pools.

- **Prevent cross-contamination in food preparation areas** by thoroughly washing hands, counters, cutting boards and utensils after they touch raw meat.

To learn more about how to protect yourself from *E. coli* please visit the CDC’s website at www.cdc.gov/ecoli/ecoli-prevention.



RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

July 8	FSIS issued a public health alert due to an Oklahoma establishment distributing approximately 16,800 pounds of ready-to-eat diced chicken products that were misbranded.
July 17	A Texas establishment recalled approximately 675 pounds of chicken samosas that contain poultry produced without the benefit of federal inspection.
July 24	A Tennessee establishment recalled approximately 16,868 pounds of various ready-to-eat frozen meat products that were produced without the benefit of federal inspection.
July 28	A Florida establishment recalled approximately 60,457 pounds of meat and poultry patty products that were repackaged, relabeled and redistributed without the benefit of federal inspection. The firm also applied the mark of inspection of another federal establishment without proper authorization.
July 30	A Canadian establishment recalled approximately 38,406 pounds of boneless beef head meat products that were not presented for import re-inspection into the United States.
For more information, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls .	

FSIS Town Hall Meetings

Employee Town Hall Meetings

Employees only.

Aug. 26

Call-in numbers: 1-888-251-2949 or (215) 861-0694.

Access codes:

9 a.m., 5390911#.

3 p.m., 9927623#.

9 p.m., 4353743#.

Submit questions for the Town Halls to

FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

Under Secretary's Town Hall - Women's Equality Day

Employees only.

Aug. 26 - 1 p.m.

Call-in numbers: 1-888-251-2949 or (215) 861-0694.

Access code: 2229031#.

Recent Events and Presentations

Cultured Animal Cell Webinar Recording - Register to view the recording at www.surveymonkey.com/r/LZS8N56.

PHIS Export 2.0 Webinar Recording and Other Resources - www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/newsroom/speeches-presentations.

Assistance for Small Meat Processors Webinar Recording and Other Resources - www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/newsroom/speeches-presentations.

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.