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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

February 2020



By Felicia Thompson, OPACE

Phone: (202) 603-2150

Educating consumers about food safety is a priority for Office of Food Safety Deputy Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured). Several times a year, she and the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education (OPACE) film educational, consumer-oriented videos about food safety for upcoming holidays and food-centric events. Dr. Brashears' latest video focused on the Super Bowl, and past videos focused on summer grilling and Thanksgiving. Image by Jonathon Thompson, OPACE.

Employees Receive Secretary's Honor Awards

By Lynn Pereira, OPACE

Phone: (202) 708-9532

The Secretary's Honor Awards are the highest awards granted by the Secretary to an individual or group for contribution or achievement in support of the Department's mission. On February 3, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue honored four FSIS employees at the 70th Annual Secretary's Honor Awards Ceremony in Washington, D.C. At the ceremony, Secretary Perdue said that all award recipients "went above and beyond the call of duty" in their roles.

Three were on an FSIS team with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer employees. Shauna Armstrong, Matthew Didday and Jordan Goldie, of the Billings Analysis and Management Branch

(BAMB) in Urbandale, Iowa, were recognized for extraordinary effort in providing exceptional innovation and customer service. Dr. Mindy Brashears, Deputy Under Secretary for the Office of Food Safety, presented the award.

In 2018, the BAMB team successfully responded to a disrupting change in USDA's ability to convey export certificates to China, the most significant market access issue faced by USDA in years. The team worked diligently in collaboration with other areas of FSIS to develop a new business process for thousands of export certificates. Their

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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.

Apr. issue – due Mar. 1 May issue – due Apr. 1
Jun. issue – due May 1 Jul. issue – due Jun. 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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SPOTLIGHT

Collaborative Efforts with National Institute of Food and Agriculture

By Leo O'Drudy, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-8693

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), formerly the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, is one of four agencies in USDA's Research, Education and Economics mission area. NIFA works through the Land-Grant University System and other partner organizations to advance knowledge for agriculture, the environment, human health and communities. The agency focuses on research, education and "extension," a term for bringing agricultural knowledge to farmers and communities, both rural and urban.

FSIS is a data-driven, science-based agency. However, we do not fund research. NIFA supports our mission to protect public health and prevent foodborne illness by awarding grants for research on food safety, and funding related education and extension activities. These food safety activities support efforts to tackle the problem of antimicrobial resistance, to improve food processing technologies, to train the next generation of food safety scientists and to reduce foodborne hazards such as disease-causing bacteria, toxins and chemical contaminants.

NIFA and FSIS are strengthened by the knowledge of staff who have worked for both agencies. FSIS Assistant Administrator for the Office of Public Health Science, Dr. Denise Eblen, led NIFA's Institute of Food Safety and Nutrition from 2015 to 2018. Eblen welcomed three former NIFA colleagues to FSIS recently: Dr. Melvin Carter (OPPD), Laarina Mullings (OPHS) and Dr. Isabel Walls (OPHS).

"While NIFA supports outreach and research on a wide variety of topics important to agriculture, I found my work there on food safety issues to be particularly rewarding," said Eblen. "I look forward to our team's continued cooperation with my former colleagues at NIFA."

Because NIFA awards grants through many of its programs on a competitive basis, FSIS annually publishes a list of research needs for researchers who are preparing grant applications to agencies that fund food safety research. (Available at <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/science/food-safety-research-priorities>.)

Walls is FSIS' Scientific Liaison. She meets regularly with NIFA National Program Leaders to update them on FSIS research priorities. Walls said, "When I was a National Program Leader at NIFA, it was very helpful to me to have this insight, to ensure the requests for grant proposals reflected FSIS research needs. I am excited to be in a position at FSIS to advocate for these needs across the food safety community."

For more on NIFA's work on food safety, go to <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/food-safety>.

Deputy Under Secretary's Column

Sharing a common vision is integral to any organization's success. It keeps us moving in the same direction and ensures that we are operationally sound while we move forward. As we enter the new decade, I envision FSIS leading its food safety efforts with scientific strategies that target pathogen control through new initiatives and the expansion of existing pathogen control policies. My 2020 Food Safety Vision will help guide us on this path.



Dr. Mindy Brashears

Technology plays a key role in reducing pathogens in our meat and poultry supply. Advancements in methods and technology allow food safety professionals in government and industry to work together — truly making food safety a collaborative effort. I want that trend to continue as technology evolves. I look forward to encouraging vetted technologies, grounded in science, that will allow us to continue making data-driven decisions. I'm excited to be on the forefront of using the best science possible to advance our food safety mission via new technologies to prevent illnesses and protect public health.

The Agency will also continue to focus on consumer research collaboration with academic and non-profit organization partners to address research gaps. We will also identify opportunities to train the next generation of scientists so that they are poised to lead the future of food safety.

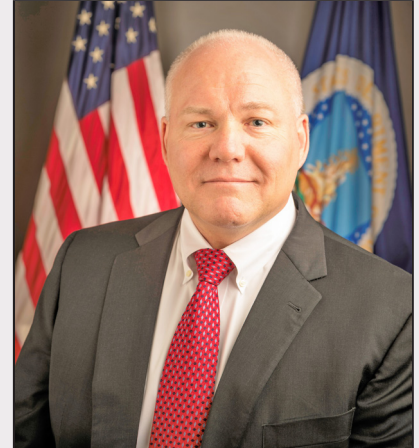
Modernization is a major part of FSIS' pathogen control policies. Our efforts to modernize inspection systems have allowed resources to be focused on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) verification, sanitation and humane handling. In 2020, we plan to publish a final rule on the Modernization of Egg Product Inspection, which will move us from prescribing hazard reduction measures to a HACCP-based system in the egg industry.

My expectation is that FSIS will serve as a hub to bring regulators, stakeholders and public health partners together across the farm to table continuum, cooperating closely together while working toward a shared goal. All these initiatives will help strengthen our approach to control deadly pathogens and

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Deputy Administrator's Column

In 1988, I was an FSIS food inspector working 9.5 hours Monday through Friday and 5.5 hours on Saturday, in Worthington, Minnesota. It didn't leave me much time to think about where my job would lead me. If you'd told me then that one day I'd move to Washington, D.C., and be a senior leader at FSIS headquarters, I'd have told you that you were crazy.



Paul Kiecker

My desire to do more in my work didn't start with a dream of climbing a government career ladder. It started small. Later, ideas came from taking an interest in what was going on around me and what others were doing. As I looked at other positions and roles at FSIS, I thought, *I could do that*. This thought, that I was capable of learning and doing just a little bit more, led to each job change, promotion and career move.

I encourage you to occasionally pause to look around at what opportunities exist for you in FSIS. Supervisors can help with this; they're there to help you see the possibilities, to help you recognize when you're capable of more. They can help you identify skills you need to develop or training opportunities to help you achieve your professional goals. It's a conversation that I encourage you to have.

I know that changes — even career opportunities — can look daunting at times. They might require you to face new or uncomfortable challenges, or even make certain concessions. My family and I relocated seven times, as the path from Worthington to Washington, D.C., took us to Nebraska, Missouri, Wisconsin and Arkansas along the way. But with each transition, my dedication to food safety has deepened while I've found new ways to help FSIS achieve our public health mission.

Although I have gotten used to living and working in Washington, D.C., I will never forget where I started nearly 32 years ago, and I appreciate everything that everyone does each and every day. Thank you!

FACES OF FOOD SAFETY

David Sandler — Ensuring FSIS is Prepared

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

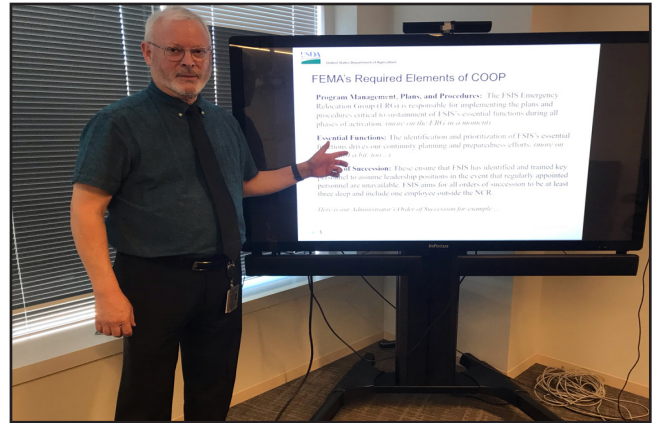
Jonathan “David” Sandler helps FSIS prepare for emergencies. The senior preparedness and response coordinator with the Significant Incident Preparedness and Response Staff (SIPRS), is part of a team that helps FSIS prepare for emergencies, plan for Continuity of Operations (COOP) and manage the FSIS Food Defense Program that is designed to protect the U.S. food supply from threats. During his 12 years at FSIS, Sandler has principally worked on COOP and the Agency’s Emergency Management Committee (EMC), a round-the-clock leadership team that addresses any significant incident.

Sandler finds working on emergency preparedness both challenging and rewarding. He says, “My job as one of the SIPRS team is all about ensuring that leadership and direction of the Agency are always in place, so folks know they’re safe at the dinner table.” COOP plays an important role in those efforts.

Continuity planning ensures that FSIS can perform mission critical essential functions during a wide range of emergency situations, including natural disasters, communications issues due to system breakdown or loss of power — essentially, any kind of resource challenge. COOP involves identifying as many of those challenges as possible and finding possible solutions in advance. It also involves succession planning for every leadership role in the Agency, including out-of-area succession if headquarters leadership is not available.

Sandler led SIPRS as acting director during the partial government shutdown in December 2018 and January 2019, and he continued that role for several more months. “It was a great experience to work directly with the Office of the Administrator on all issues pertaining to SIPRS and its responsibilities,” he said about the experience. “Though it was a difficult period, I think SIPRS came out as a stronger, even more cohesive staff.”

FSIS empowers Sandler and SIPRS to be successful in protecting public health. He receives assistance in the form of new ideas from the USDA-level COOP team and from the rest of the continuity community in USDA — his counterparts in other USDA agencies and programs. He also learns best practices from other federal agencies. Said Sandler, “The interactions among this extended team are extremely valuable, particularly as all of us working toward continuity strive to ensure that



David Sandler presents refresher COOP information. Photo by Katherine Luers, SIPRS.

we’re following the directives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for USDA and FSIS COOP planning. FSIS leadership also recognizes the importance of continuity planning and commits time and funding to ensuring the Agency is well-prepared to address a continuity scenario.”

There is no “typical day” in SIPRS. Said Sandler, “COOP planning is constant. I work with the program areas of FSIS, like the Office of Field Operations and the Office of Management, to ensure that their continuity preparations are as up to date as possible. I provide training to people new to continuity planning or to the Emergency Management Committee, as well as to anyone who simply wants some refresher training on either. COOP planning evolves as new recommendations come from FEMA or USDA, and a good part of my day is devoted to adjusting or updating our FSIS plans, equipment and procedures.”

Sandler believes he performs his job better when he is able to bounce ideas off colleagues and get their input, “I think the roots of this go back to points earlier in my career. I’ve been very fortunate to have had several jobs where I managed various projects that hinged on consensus building. The teams I was managing were always made up of incredibly intelligent people — from government, academia and industry. It taught me to listen to and respect people’s ideas and suggestions, and to be open to that input in formulating whatever my own position needed to be.”

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SAFETY CORNER

Occupational Noise and Hearing Protection

By Sarath Seneviratne, OM

Phone: (240) 755-2795

Noise (unwanted sound) is one of the most prevalent occupational health problems. Exposure to excessive harmful noise may cause hearing loss or related hearing illnesses.

The extent of the noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) depends on the intensity of the noise and the duration of the exposure. Noise-induced hearing loss is the most common permanent and preventable occupational injury. Unlike most injuries, it's difficult to tell when you've been affected by NIHL because it's painless and progressive.

NIHL can be temporary or permanent. Temporary hearing loss results from short-term exposures to noise with normal hearing returning after a period of rest. Generally, prolonged exposure to high noise levels can cause permanent damage. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Noise Standard (29 CFR 1910.95) requires employers to have a hearing conservation program in place if workers are exposed to a time-weighted average (TWA) noise level of 85 decibels (dBA) or higher over an 8-hour work shift. OSHA's permissible exposure limit (PEL) for noise exposure is 90 dBA for an 8-hour TWA and the standard uses a 5-dBA exchange rate. This means that when the noise level is increased by 5 dBA, the amount of time a person can be exposed is cut in

half. For example, a person exposed to noise levels of 95 dBA (5 dBA above the OSHA PEL of 90 dBA) is limited to four hours exposure time in order to be compliant with the daily OSHA PEL.

To ensure OSHA's training requirements are met, the FSIS Environmental, Safety and Health Group (ESHG) has developed training materials for supervisors to use. The training materials consist of three PowerPoint presentations and can be found on the ESHG intranet site.

Agency-provided Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is available and can be ordered from the Material Management Service Center (formerly the Beltsville Service Center). PPE item names and descriptions can be found in the Specialty Supply Catalog. Specific hearing protection equipment includes earmuffs (Item nos., FSIS-12MUFF, FSIS-12MUFF-2) and foam plugs (Item nos., FSIS-12FOAM, FSIS-71, FSIS-12FWC, FSIS 12MLG, FSIS-12SM, FSIS-12LG, FSIS-63, FSIS-11, FSIS-11RP). FSIS offers various types of hearing protection so workers can select a personally comfortable, effective solution.

...Continued from page 3

Deputy Under Secretary's Column

find life-saving solutions. I look forward to embarking on this new and focused path with you, and I'm confident that FSIS will continue to be bold in making decisions and steadfast in implementing data- and science-based decisions.

Around the Agency



The USDA held a "Final Push" for the 2019 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) on the Whitten Building patio in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 9. The event encouraged USDA employees donate monetarily or pledge to volunteer their time at local charities for causes of their choice.

Every year, FSIS employees donate thousands of dollars, hundreds of volunteer hours, non-perishable food and a variety of items (i.e., feminine hygiene products, coats, socks, toys, etc.) to families in need across the country. In attendance at Final Push event were FSIS Deputy Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, center), Office of Field Operations Program Assistant Pam White (pictured, left), and Foreign Agricultural Service Special Advisor Kelly Stange (pictured, right).

Photo by FSIS Office of Planning, Analysis and Risk Management Deputy Assistant Administrator and this year's USDA CFC Campaign Manager Deep Saini.

SNAPSHOTS FROM

Miami, Fla.

On Oct. 28, 2019, Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit's (OIEA) Compliance Investigations Division Investigators Sandra Fabregas-Ruiz (pictured, left) and Mark Tabb (pictured, second from right) presented on "Retail Recordkeeping for Establishments and Retail Stores that Grind Raw Beef Products" to 33 meat department managers of Presidente Supermarkets located throughout South Florida. Attendees received information and materials — in English and Spanish — and asked questions about establishing mandatory recordkeeping requirements.



Pictured, from left: OIEA Compliance Investigator Sandra Fabregas-Ruiz, General Manager for Presidente Supermarkets Meat Departments Odalys Hernandez, Compliance Investigator Mark Tabb and Assistant General Manager of Presidente Supermarkets Meat Departments Katherine Valdes gather for a photo after the presentation. Photo by Mark Tabb, OIEA.



OIEA team members gather after the training. Pictured, kneeling, from left: ELD (detailee) Peter Duryea and ELD's Enforcement Operations Branch's (EOB) Criminal Enforcement Group Team Lead Troy Hambright. Pictured, back row, from left: CID Director Mark Crowe, ELD EOB Chief Carlynn Cockrum, ELD Senior Compliance Specialist Deena Ismail, CID Deputy Regional Director in the Southeast Region Scott Ehle, and CID Deputy Director Will Gillingwater. Photo by Elizabeth Starrett, OIEA.

Washington, D.C.

On Oct. 25, 2019, Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit's (OIEA) Compliance and Investigations Division (CID) and Enforcement and Litigation Division (ELD) joined together to present a webinar training for CID compliance investigators on the custom exempt review process. Recently, some responsibilities for conducting custom exempt reviews shifted to OIEA's CID.

THE FIELD

Washington, D.C.

Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit's (OIEA) Audit and Resource Management Division Senior Program Auditors Jon Morse (pictured, left) and Joel Bachert (not pictured) attended the IMPACT Expo on Oct. 31, 2019. The event featured 25 projects from across USDA mission areas and showcased some of the ways USDA is modernizing to serve its customers. At the expo, Morse and Bachert spoke about their experiences in the field with Office of Field Operations Senior Program Analyst Arriell Garner (pictured, right), who reviewed the ongoing eDevice initiative to connect field employees. Already in the pilot program phase, this program will make a huge impact in employee engagement through improving access to information, training and surveys for our frontline employees who previously did not have computer access.



Senior Program Auditor Jon Morse and senior program analyst Arriell Garner, display an eDevice that FSIS field employees will receive to enhance their connectivity with colleagues within the Agency. Photo by Joel Bachert, OIEA.



Washington, D.C.

Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Departmental Management Don Bice presented Yolande Mitchell, Management Analyst in the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education's Digital and Executive Communications Staff, with an Assistant Secretary Award on Oct. 17, 2019. Mitchell was honored for delivering enhancements and streamlining processes in developing Secretarial correspondence. Photo by Gordon Wilson, OPACE.

Cincinnati, Ohio

Office of Field Operations Consumer Safety Inspectors (CSI) Darrell "Craig" Butler (pictured, right), Raymond Harris (not pictured) and Wanda Zabonick (not pictured) conducted an outreach event at Mount Healthy Elementary School on Nov. 22, 2019. The inspectors spoke with 125 students — five 3rd grade classes — about FSIS' four food safety messages: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill; showed them a Fight BAC!® video; and introduced them to Thermy™ the thermometer (pictured, left). The students and teachers received food safety education materials, including activity books, crayons and "Is it done yet?" magnets.



Butler stands by a waving Thermy™ at the event. The costume is worn by Mrs. Ashley Carr, the teacher of Zabonick's grandson. Photo by Wanda Zabonick, 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 01-20, Mandatory Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights Training for all FSIS Employees
- Notice 02-20, Analysis of *E. coli* and *Enterococcus* of Fish of the Order of Siluriformes
- Notice 03-20, Cecal Sampling to Expand the National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System Program to Include Veal, Sheep, Lamb, and Goats
- Notice 04-20, Lymph Node Testing to Complement the National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System Program
- Notice 05-20, New FSIS Security Paper and Seven Digit Export Stamp for use with the Export Module of the Public Health Information System - Phase Three
- Notice 06-20, 2020 Mileage Reimbursement Rates

FSIS Presents Collaborative One Health Research Project

By Dr. John Linville, OPPD

Phone: (402) 344-5000

The 2019 American Public Health Association (APHA) annual meeting was November 2-6 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The APHA's Annual Meeting and Expo is designed to reach a much broader public health audience than just food safety professionals. There is often a focus on One Health – the intersection of animal and human health and how one affects the other – and this year's topics included emerging zoonoses (diseases transmitted to humans from animals), vector-borne diseases (diseases spread by mosquitoes, ticks and fleas) and the link to ecosystem change; climate and health adaptation; and climate-related impacts on global health. Food, especially in terms of nutrition and security (in the public health sense, meaning availability of food) and social inequities were big topics.

I presented a poster in APHA's Veterinary Special Interest Group's series on One Health. My poster featured the collaborative work done by FSIS' Office of Policy and Program Development, Office of Public Health Science and Office of Planning, Analysis and Risk Management that was published in the Journal of Food Protection. The topic was the "Effects of Extreme Weather on *Salmonella* Positives in Young Chicken Slaughter Establishments." It focused on how we developed an impact "backcast" model using FSIS sampling and external weather and disaster data. The basic finding was that looking at weather and disasters helps explain spikes in *Salmonella* in young chicken carcasses at slaughter. The poster was generally well-received and generated some good discussion with the public health community at large. One other increasing topic of interest at the conference was data visualization, and there were several great presentations and roundtables on the topic.



Dr. John Linville (pictured, above), Office of Program and Policy Development (OPPD), presents a scientific poster at the American Public Health Association (APHA) 2019 annual meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The presentation focused on collaborative work by OPPD, the Office of Public Health Science and the Office of Planning, Analysis and Risk Management. The new design template suggested by APHA was intended to help attendees more easily choose posters of interest to view. Photo by Melissa Green, University of North Carolina.

Conference organizers strongly recommended using a new poster template designed to increase the overall impact of a poster. I formatted my poster using the new design and was pleasantly surprised to find that the design was well-adopted with about a quarter to a third of presenters using the new format. I do think the design likely increased curiosity by allowing viewers to more easily pick out topics of interest from the veritable sea of posters available for viewing in the short amount of time they were on display.

OEED Career/Training Corner

By Kimberly Kelley, OEED

Phone: (301) 289-9730



Pictured, front row, from left: Sara Taetzsch, Bonnie Kissler, Jasmyne Davis, Rallene Glascoe, Jennifer Hartman, Amy Neidig, Melissa Hlavacek, Joanna Zablotzky-Kufel, Jacquelyn Mariano and Brandy Leys. Pictured, second row, from left: OEED Program Manager Kimberly Kelley, Alethea Payton, Gari Jo Pazdzinski, Belinda Pulido, Sydney Stewart, Jana Gunther, Robert Washington, Morgan Elser, Alaaeldeen Ahmed, Sergio Bolanos and Adria Clay. Pictured, back row, from left: Jimmy Rose, Brandon Stein, Bobby Coleman, Tammy Nixon, Ben Wolfe, Donald Russel, Robert Hendry, Melanie Abley and David Pell. Photo courtesy of Kimberly Kelley, OEED.

FSIS employees took part in the New Supervisor Training Program (NSTP) on Oct. 28, 2019 – Nov. 8, 2019, in College Park, Maryland. The goal of the training is to prepare new supervisors for the challenges of their leadership roles and to emphasize supervisory behaviors that encompass the knowledge, skills and other attributes required to build high-performance teams.

...Continued from page 4

While Sandler believes “all of us in FSIS have to possess all of the core values in order to perform our jobs to the highest professional level,” his work in SIPRS is highly Solutions-Oriented. While SIPRS plans and prepares for direction of the Agency’s functions for all continuity challenges they have identified, new ideas and challenges arise all the time. SIPRS is constantly reevaluating. Sandler describes his co-workers as, “Subject matter experts. Each one of them — and an excellent team to work with.”

When asked if he thinks his job is important to FSIS, to USDA and to the nation, Sandler replied, “Yes, I definitely do. I don’t think it’s an exaggeration when FSIS leadership says that all jobs in the Agency impact the nation. Everything we do, in one way or the other, supports continuous inspection of FSIS-regulated product to ensure food safety.”

He said his job gives him a lot of personal satisfaction. “I tried to instill in my three kids, as they were looking toward career paths, to strive for something that would make them feel, at the end of the day, they had made people’s lives better. I think all of us in FSIS can feel proud about how we directly impact everyone in this country by ensuring that the food they eat is safe,” said Sandler.

Sandler is married to Hilde Vettters, a native of Belgium; they met in an international performance group that was comprised of five casts (each with 100-plus college students) that travelled around the globe for a year putting on shows as a vehicle for learning about world cultures. They still love to travel, mostly to visit her extended family in Belgium and their three adult children and six grandchildren in Spain and California.

Faces of Food Safety



David Sandler, Senior Preparedness and Response Coordinator with the Significant Incident Preparedness and Response Staff (SIPRS) in Washington, D.C. Photo by Felicia Thompson, OPACE.

Career Opportunities in the Federal Space

By Gordon Wilson Jr., OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-0798

You're a Govee' (term used to describe a civilian government employee), now what? Whether you just started your career in the federal government or been a Govee' for a while now, navigating your career could be tough, but you don't have to do it alone.

Job shadowing is a way to do on-the-job training. A job shadowing program is a work experience option where an employee learns about a position by walking through the work as a "shadow" to a competent worker from another area. The job shadowing experience provides temporary exposure to the work product in an area of interest outside the normal working environment. Not only do job shadowers get to observe the day-to-day activities of someone working in a job of interest, job shadowers could get a bit of cross-training about the most critical aspects of tasks involved in that particular job. For example, a human resources staff member who's interested in recruiting may use the organization's job shadowing program for employees outside human resources to shadow a recruiter.

A mentoring relationship is usually a formal or informal partnership between an employee who has voluntarily expressed a need in a developmental area or wants professional

developmental opportunities, and an employee (mentor) who volunteers and is experienced and has expert knowledge or prior experience to mentor the employee. Mentoring is a vehicle for both the mentor and protégé to develop new skills, knowledge and experiences that will enhance their careers.

The purpose and objectives of mentoring are to provide employees with opportunities to form new connections, broaden employee experience, assist in developing goals and cultivate new opportunities. There are four key objectives to a mentoring program: Transfer Institutional Knowledge, Enhance Employee Skills, Increase Employee Retention, and Attract Top Talent. These objectives allow USDA and its agencies to strengthen its foundation and ensure a pipeline of talented, skilled, motivated employees for succession planning.

Detail assignments are another opportunity for trying out new job experiences. FSIS offices use detail assignments to temporarily supplement current staff, cover while waiting to fill vacancies and other reasons. Managers often advertise these opportunities in the *Wednesday Newsline*, the Agency's newsletter that is emailed weekly.

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Employees Receive Secretary's Honor Award



Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, left), Deputy Under Secretary for the Office of Food Safety, presented Office of the Chief Financial Officer employees with a Secretary's Honor Award. Pictured (from left) Dr. Brashears, Shauna Armstrong, Matthew Didday, Jordan Goldie, Secretary Sonny Perdue and Deputy Secretary Stephen Censky. Photo courtesy of USDA Office of Communications.

work to successfully implement the new system continuously exceeded expectations set by Agency leadership. The team's timely and dedicated response ensured that thousands of export certificates, representing millions of dollars in traded commodities, reached their destination. These efforts made an impact on both domestic and international economies.

Shannon McMurtrey of the FSIS Office of International Coordination was recognized with the multi-agency Trade Negotiation Team. The team members were McMurtrey and others from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Foreign Agricultural Service. The team received the award for the successful completion of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), advancing U.S. agricultural interests in our most important markets for America's farmers, ranchers and agribusiness. Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs Ted McKinney presented the award. In the negotiations, McMurtrey was the FSIS representative there to ensure FSIS food safety regulations and approaches were taken into account so that the agreement did not diminish the high standards of food safety. Congratulations to Armstrong, Didday, Goldie and McMurtrey for their well-deserved recognition.

Recent FSIS Retirees

Thank you for your service and dedication to public health.

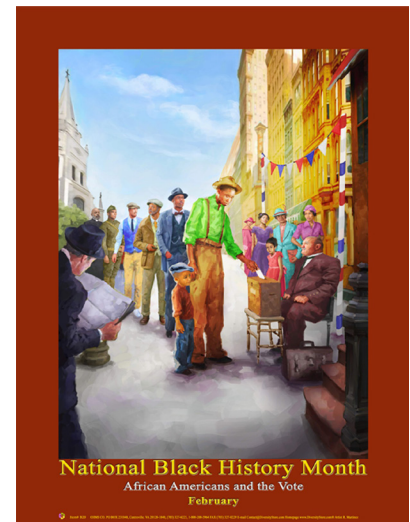
Name/Position	Duty Station	Years of Service	Name/Position	Duty Station	Years of Service
Barea, Nilda L., SVMO	Brighton, Tenn.	30	Johnson, Annie M., FI-S	Sebastopol, Miss.	18
Brickerd, Patricia L., Mgmt. & Prog. Analyst	Washington, D.C.	33	Martin, William D., CSI	Batesville, Ark.	40
Daniels, Frankie K., CSI	Springdale, Ark.	45	McGovern, Evelyn C., Supv. HR Spec.	Washington, D.C.	43
Fassig, Samuel M., SVMO	Boise, Idaho	22	Owens, Samuel B., FI-S	Holcomb, Kan.	20
Hagedorn, Lee A., CSI	Denver, Colo.	34	Presswood, Stanley V., FI-S	Hillsdale, Ill.	13
Harlan, Marsha K., CSI	Ozark, Ark.	20	Prondzinski, Mavis D., CSI	Bay City, Ore.	18
Holt, Kristin G., VMO	Atlanta, Ga.	37	Reich, Thomas P., CSI	Everett, Wash.	41
Jackson, Timothy E., CSI	Elberton, Ga.	43	Sieker, Ronald G., CSI	Dodge City, Kan.	26
Johnson, Annie L., FI-S	Center, Texas	21	Watson Jr., Clarence, CSI	San Diego, Calif.	38

February is Black History Month

Each February, the United States observes African American History Month by celebrating and recognizing the accomplishments and contributions Blacks have made to American history.

In 1986, Congress passed a joint resolution designating the month of February as “National Black (Afro American) History Month.” Congress noted that the month of February would provide opportunities for educational institutions and the public “to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of the many contributions of Black Americans to our country and the world.”

USDA continues to host events during the month of February to remember and honor African American contributions to society and the farming community in particular. As we celebrate this year, let’s do so with knowledge of how it all began.



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



RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

January 2	FSIS Issues Public Health Alert for Products Associated with the FDA Almark Foods Recall Due to Possible <i>Listeria Monocytogenes</i> Contamination.
January 3	Kettle Cuisine Midco, LLC., Recalls Ready-to-Eat Soup Products Due to Misbranding and Undeclared Allergens.
January 9	FSIS Issues Public Health Alert for Swedish Meatball Products Due to Misbranding and an Undeclared Allergen.
January 10	Culinary International, LLC., Recalls Chicken Burrito Products Due to Misbranding and Undeclared Allergens.
January 24	Amity Packing Company, Inc., Recalls Raw Ground Beef Products Due to Possible Foreign Matter Contamination.
January 24	Golden Pearl Trading Corporation Recalls Ready-to-Eat Imported Siluriformes Products Produced Without Benefit of Import Inspection.
January 29	Astrochef, LLC., Recalls Pepperoni Stuffed Pizza Sandwich Products Due to Misbranding and Undeclared Allergens.
For more information, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls .	

Voluntary Leave Transfer Program

The Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP) allows federal employees to donate annual leave for use by other federal employees who are experiencing a personal or family medical emergency. To be considered for assistance via the VLTP, applicants must: 1) be a current federal employee; 2) obtain approval from their supervisor to be absent from work due to the medical emergency for which they are applying to the VLTP program; 3) be experiencing a personal or family medical emergency that results in serious financial hardship for the employee because he/she has insufficient accrued leave to cover the absence; 4) submit a completed Form AD-1046, provide a personal statement and a signed medical document that explains the medical emergency and the duration of the medical emergency; and 5) have the Form AD-1046 signed by their supervisor.

Please ensure Form AD-1046 is complete and medical documentation is provided so as not to delay receipt of the decision notification. For assistance, contact PayAndLeaveGuidance@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 Spring 2020 issue by April 1. 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.

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.