

The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

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

Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue (pictured, right) swore in Paul Kiecker (left) as Administrator of the Food Safety and Inspection Service on March 12, in the Secretary's office in Washington, D.C.

Kiecker's wife Jan (center), held the Bible on which he took the oath of office. The Bible was given to him by his mother. His daughter Chelsea and son Ryan (not pictured) also attended the swearing-in.

Kiecker was previously Deputy Administrator for FSIS, and served as the Agency's Acting Administrator from May of 2018 until January of 2019. In his 30 years with FSIS, he has been committed to a strong public health vision that has guided him to overcome obstacles, identify opportunities for improvement, manage resources efficiently and achieve food safety objectives to prevent foodborne illness. Since joining FSIS in 1988 as a food inspector, Kiecker has served in a number of roles at the Agency.



Photo by Tom Witham, USDA.

On March 23, another USDA food safety leader also stepped up to a higher post, when Dr. Mindy Brashears was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as Under Secretary for Food Safety. She had served as Deputy Under Secretary since January 2019.

The Impact of Women on Food Safety

By Leo O'Drudy, OPACE
Phone: (202) 720-8693

No better month than March — National Women's History Month — to spotlight some of the women who have made a difference in public health through food safety. There are too many accomplished women to recognize even a fraction of them in this article, but here are some highlights.

Perhaps the first woman known to have made a documented difference in food safety was Geneviève Thiroux d'Arconville, an 18th century French writer who for ten years carried out some of the first rigorous experiments on how to prevent food from spoiling, discovering in particular that protecting it from air is effective. She wrote anonymously because of the social conventions of the time about female authors.

Ruth Ella Moore, Ph.D., was the first African-American woman to earn a doctorate in natural science, which she accomplished at The Ohio State University in 1933. Among her many

research subjects were enterobacteria (a variety of bacteria that includes familiar pathogens, such as *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and *Shigella*) and the reactions of gut micro-organisms to antibiotics.

Alice Catherine Evans was a USDA scientist in the early 20th century. After researching contamination and disease in milk, she successfully advocated for industry to accept pasteurization of raw milk in 1930. Pasteurization significantly reduced the prevalence of brucellosis, which can cause infection in animals and humans.

Margaret Dick was the chief microbiologist for Kraft Foods Australia from the 1940s through the 1980s. Her work in safe food production formed the basis of what became Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point, or HACCP.

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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

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.

May issue – due Apr. 1 Jun. issue – due May 1

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

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

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SPOTLIGHT

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service Promotes Food Safety

By Jesus Garcia, OPACE

Phone: (202) 260-9432

The mission of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is to decrease food insecurity and reduce hunger. The agency directs 15 nutrition assistance programs that leverage America's agricultural abundance to ensure children, low-income individuals and families have nutritious food to eat that is safe and wholesome.

Providing nutrition guidance and ensuring food safety is paramount at FNS to protect people served by FNS programs from foodborne illness. FNS achieves this by developing food safety education, training and technical assistance resources to support FNS program operators. FNS staff rely on science-based food safety research and work closely with external food safety partners, such as FSIS, to ensure that resources are useful and reflect current knowledge. FSIS and FNS collaborations go beyond research. FSIS supports FNS campaigns, such as National School Breakfast Week, and the FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline helps connect callers with the correct resources when they have a question about FNS programs. This fall, FSIS will highlight the FNS healthy eating tool, MyPlate (www.choosemyplate.gov), in its back-to-school food safety campaign.

FNS programs have contributed to the decrease of hunger and food insecurity in the United States. USDA defines food insecurity as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. The most recent statistics from USDA's Economic Research Service show a decline in food insecurity. In 2017, 11.8 percent of households were food insecure at least some time during the year. In 2018, that number dropped to 11.1 percent.

The FNS Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) works to improve health and well-being by encouraging people to make better food choices, develop sound eating habits and incorporate more physical activity. The MyPlate initiative guides consumers in achieving these goals. Generations grew up learning about healthy eating with the Food Guide Pyramid. The new message is represented in a MyPlate infographic that emphasizes portion sizes.

March is National Nutrition Month, an annual awareness campaign created by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics to promote healthy lifestyles, which aligns with the FNS mission. MyPlate is a large part of how schools and public health organizations get their messages out. MyPlate is part of a larger communications initiative based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines are updated every five years by USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services. The Guidelines are a key resource for health professionals and policymakers to help Americans enjoy a healthy eating pattern, to promote health and to prevent chronic disease.

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Under Secretary's Column

On March 23, I was confirmed by the Senate as USDA's Under Secretary for Food Safety. I am proud and honored to serve with such dedicated employees. As we tackle the current challenges with COVID-19, I'm confident in your ability to carry out our food safety mission, and I thank you for your commitment.



Dr. Mindy Brashears

I've recently shared with many of you my 2020 Food Safety Vision. As your Under Secretary, I'm pleased to continue to share details about my vision.

Throughout FSIS, our relationships — both internal and external — provide vital lines of communication for rapidly sharing information and making decisions. I work closely with FSIS leadership, and will continue to seek advice and counsel on how I can support the Agency's outreach and relationship management across the executive and legislative branches and with a variety of stakeholders.

Just as I am connected to FSIS leadership and each district office, you are also connected to me, to headquarters and to USDA. I value each of the conversations I've had and all the direct input you have provided. Your voices matter — to me, to your leadership and to the Department. These visits helped me understand the challenges and needs you face and the stakeholders you serve.

Continuing to build and enhance relationships with small and very small establishments will remain a high priority. These establishments have different needs than larger establishments, and we are committed to providing resources that help them meet regulatory requirements. One of the ways the Agency is interacting with these establishments is through roundtable listening sessions. In February, FSIS hosted the first roundtable of 2020 in Austin, Texas. Roundtables and listening sessions are excellent opportunities to gather feedback and develop future outreach activities.

Having strong relationships with universities, research institutions and international bodies is also essential to our staying informed about cutting edge research. It is also critical

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Administrator's Column

Over the last 30 years with FSIS, I have served in positions as diverse as food inspector, compliance investigator, deputy district manager, district manager and deputy assistant administrator for the Office of Field Operations. On March 12, I was sworn in as Administrator of FSIS by Secretary Perdue,



Paul Kiecker

and I'm grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve the Agency in this new role, particularly in light of the current situation with COVID-19, and our vital role in verifying the safety of FSIS-regulated products.

There are always questions that come with a change in leadership and a new challenge like COVID-19. Our food safety mission is more important than ever, and I remain committed to the advancement of our strategic goals — our major plans and priorities will not change, including your safety as first. The Agency will continue to move forward with developing and implementing modernized inspection systems for poultry, swine and beef slaughter and for processed egg products. We will reduce foodborne pathogens through science-based *Salmonella* performance standards in poultry, beef and pork and *Campylobacter* performance standards in poultry. We made major strides recently, including the debut of the Public Health Information System's Export Module, and I look forward to further improving and expanding our capabilities as we move toward more paperless processes.

Every day, I draw from my experiences in the field as I make decisions that affect FSIS employees, stakeholders and the public. As the Agency considers new policies and changes, I want us to stay focused and to carefully consider how changes might impact our personnel and industry, including the small and very small plants that make up 90 percent of the establishments we regulate.

My years with the Agency have helped me appreciate the value of your work to the American public and the people worldwide who eat our regulated products. I hope each of you recognize this in your own role and will strive to do your best each day. I look forward to working with you all in my new role as Administrator to ensure public health and the safety of our food supply.

FACES OF FOOD SAFETY

Dr. Brianna Medina Returns to Her New England Roots

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

Dr. Brianna Medina grew up on Cape Cod in Massachusetts, where the farming community is small. Her father didn't want his daughter to grow up thinking that food came from the grocery store, so he made sure she knew about agriculture. This early exposure to agriculture led Medina to know from a young age that she wanted to be a veterinarian. She worked in small animal veterinary clinics throughout high school. While studying animal science at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, she became involved with their beef program, where working with cows became her passion, specifically, sustainable beef production. In her Veterinary Public Health class at Ross University's veterinary school in St. Kitts, West Indies, Medina attended lectures about FSIS' role in meat inspection and was quite intrigued. After completing an externship with FSIS her fourth year of veterinary school, she knew FSIS was where she wanted to be.

Back to Her Roots

This month, Medina celebrates seven years with FSIS. As a supervisory public health veterinarian (SPHV) in the Philadelphia District, Medina has a patrol assignment in the Providence, Rhode Island, circuit. Her FSIS career began as a relief SPHV in the Dallas District; she then transferred to a HACCP-based Inspection Models Project (HIMP) poultry plant, which became one of the first New Poultry Inspection System (NPIS) establishments. After having identical twin girls in 2016, Medina wanted to move back home to Massachusetts to be near family. She has two main responsibilities in her current SPHV position in Westport, Massachusetts — protecting public health and supervision. These two responsibilities are intertwined and include supervising two consumer safety inspectors in small and very small red meat establishments and relief inspectors at a small, family-owned poultry establishment.

Medina is happy to be back in her home state. She is passionate about agriculture in New England because it is such a unique region where animal breeds that are not common to the rest of the United States are raised, such as Belted Galloway and Firefly Pinzgauer cattle. "New England agriculture means working with people who raise 4-H show animals, free-range pigs, heritage breed milking goats and backyard chickens. We have a father and son dropping off the steer they've raised and shown for the past two years. They may have questions about what exactly USDA inspection means or how it is



Dr. Brianna Medina, SPHV in the Philadelphia District, photographed in the pens at establishment M46351 in Westport, Massachusetts. Photo by Tom Garvey, FLS Providence Circuit.

performed. I get the satisfaction of knowing that FSIS inspection of poultry from a local farm means the community has safe, wholesome, unadulterated chicken to eat," said Medina.

The very small plant in Westport that Medina supervises is a teaching facility run by trustees of a nonprofit organization that preserves agricultural land; every month, they offer tours to students from two local agricultural high schools and the University of Rhode Island.

Career Highlights

Milestones in Medina's career include working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in an investigation to locate the source of a *Salmonella* Blockley serotype that caused foodborne illness in the Northeast region. Another was working with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Rhode Island Department of Agriculture and the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture to ensure proper livestock disease surveillance was occurring. During a brucellosis outbreak in 2019, Rhode Island was declared brucellosis free because one of the establishments she covers submitted over 50 brucellosis tests from boars and sows that year — no other Rhode Island establishments submitted swine samples.

"Performing my job makes me feel like I am making a difference in the world. Through the decisions that I make daily, I am protecting consumers — my family, my neighbors, my friends and my colleagues. I educate consumers, farmers, plant management and inspection personnel and, as an SPHV, I am an advocate and an educator for animal welfare," said Medina.

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In the first half of the 20th century, women also played a major role in one of the most important weapons against bacterial infection: penicillin. Elizabeth McCoy, Ph.D., along with researching botulism, discovered a penicillin strain, leading to the drug's widespread commercial use. Gladys Lounsbury Hobby, Ph.D., took penicillin from lab experiment to mass production, saving the lives of many soldiers in World War II. Dr. Zinaida Yermolyeva (specific degree unknown),



Ruth Ella Moore in a file photo from Howard University and the American Society for Microbiology.

of the then-Soviet Union, researched bacteriophages and natural antimicrobial agents and is credited with the development in her country of a type of penicillin.

But as pathogens evolve to resist antibiotics like penicillin, women have responded to this emerging threat as well. Among early and mid-20th century women who played key roles in researching and understanding antibiotic resistance

(ABR) were Hattie Alexander, M.D., and Mary Barber, M.D. Their legacy continues with today's scientists such as Ruth Hall, Ph.D., who identified the mechanism for spreading ABR in bacteria, including *E. coli* and *Salmonella*, and contributed to Australian government policy on antibiotic use in agriculture. Houra Merrikh, Ph.D., has made discoveries on how bacteria mutate to adapt to antibiotics, and researches ways to slow this adaption. Liz Sockett, Ph.D., is researching predatory bacteria that can attack ABR bacteria like *E. coli* and *Shigella*.

Pascale Cossart, Ph.D., of the Pasteur Institute in Paris, France, is the world's foremost authority on *Listeria*.

Una M. Ryan, Ph.D., of Ireland, conducts important research in Australia on *Cryptosporidium*.

Julie Theriot, Ph.D., performs research on infectious agents such as *Shigella* and *Listeria* for Stanford University.

Joanna Verran, Ph.D., is a British scientist who works on the interactions of microorganisms with surfaces, including food preparation surfaces. She was the academic lead for a U.K. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food project that worked with industry on studying the effect of wear and

tear on how well food surfaces can be cleaned. The project informed a European Commission funded program called "PathogenCombat," which informed small- and medium-sized enterprises about food hygienic preparation.

At USDA, many women have made their mark on food safety and food policy. At one time, there was a position called Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Services. One woman who held that post in the 1970s was Carol Tucker Foreman, who went on to become a prominent food safety advocate with various consumer organizations. That Assistant Secretary job was elevated to Under Secretary status in 1993, and in 1994 it was divided into two: the Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, and the Under Secretary for Food Safety.

The first Under Secretary for Food Safety was Catherine Woteki, Ph.D., and the women who came after her were Elsa Murano, Ph.D., and Elisabeth Hagen, M.D. Currently serving in this post is Mindy Brashears, Ph.D., who was confirmed by the Senate on March 23. She was first nominated for the job in May 2018 and had served as Deputy Under Secretary since January 2019. Dr. Brashears champions diversity in her field, encouraging women and minorities to go into science, technology, engineering and mathematics as she represents USDA to stakeholders around the globe.



Geneviève Thiroux d'Arconville, 1735 painting by Charles-Antoine Coypel.

A look at any issue of *The Beacon* over the years will show that many women in FSIS, in many types of jobs, play a vital role in fighting foodborne illness and protecting public health. In Fiscal Year 2019, the overall FSIS workforce was 47 percent female, and 51 percent of the executive or senior level employees (grades 15 and above) were female. They have been consumer educators, laboratory scientists, policy analysts and many others – and especially inspectors and public health veterinarians. To all of them, and to everyone who does this lifesaving work, the nation owes a debt of gratitude.

SNAPSHOTS FROM

Hinton, Va.

On Jan. 27, Office of Food Safety (OFS) Under Secretary Mindy Brashears (pictured, front row, second from left), former FSIS Administrator Carmen Rottenberg (pictured, second row, right) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, third row, right) provided a tour of a turkey processing and slaughter establishment to USDA leaders. FSIS inspection personnel at Establishment P-1096A contributed to the tour, which included post- and ante-mortem inspection and slaughter procedures.



USDA, OFS and FSIS leaders join FSIS inspection personnel for a group photo after their plant tour. Pictured, front row, from left: OFS Chief of Staff Shawna Newsome, Under Secretary Mindy Brashears, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Sara Taetzsch, Consumer Safety Inspector Ivy Price, Senior Advisor to the Secretary Campbell Shuford and the Secretary's Chief of Staff Joby Young. Pictured, second row, from left: Senior Advisor to the Secretary Dudley Hoskins, Frontline Supervisor Dr. Dwayne Blakeney, and former FSIS Administrator Carmen Rottenberg. Pictured, back row: FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker. Photo courtesy of Dwayne Blakeney, OFO.



Pictured, from left: Capt. Kis Robertson Hale, Cmdr. Nisha Antoine, Cmdr. Catherine Rockwell, Cmdr. Jeff Tarrant, Capt. Malaysia Harrell, Lt. Cmdr. Oliver Ou, Lt. Cmdr. Sally Ann Iverson, Lt. Cmdr. Jennifer Freiman and Lt. Cmdr. Gamola Fortenberry.

Washington, D.C.

On Feb. 13, U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officers serving at FSIS gather to wish Capt. Malaysia Harrell (center) and Lt. Cmdr. Oliver Ou (pictured, fourth from right) well as they move on to new positions at the Department of Defense and U.S. Food and Drug Administration, respectively. Since Feb. 3, Commissioned Corps officers have worn their Operational Dress Uniform daily, signaling their readiness and willingness to serve when called upon. As of early March, at least three FSIS Commissioned Corps officers have deployed in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency. USPHS officers help FSIS achieve its public health mission every day while supporting the nation as America's health responders.

THE FIELD



FSIS employees and DCF staff gather for a group photo after the FSIS recruiting event. Pictured, front row, from left: Lisa Strunk (DCF), Becki Travis (DCF), Resource Coordinator Liz Meersman (FSIS), Consumer Safety Inspector Rosario Resendiz (FSIS), Eric Hunt (DCF) and Dustin Costello (DCF). Pictured, back row, from left: Aida Avalos (DCF), Dan Decker (DCF), Julie Glendenning (DCF), Springdale District Manager Robert Bane (FSIS), Management Analyst Liz Simmons (FSIS), Frontline Supervisor Dr. Carmen Herbrandson (FSIS) and Springdale Deputy District Manager Dr. Evan Sumner (FSIS). Photo courtesy of Liz Simmons, OFO.

Arkansas City, Kan.

On Dec. 17-18, 2019, staff from the Office of Field Operations' (OFO) Springdale District Office partnered with the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) to host recruiting events in Winfield and Wichita, Kansas, for food inspector vacancies in Arkansas City, Kansas. Applicants received assistance with creating USAJOBS accounts, drafting resumes and applying for open positions. The team determined that 20 applicants met the minimum qualifications.

Buffalo, N.Y.

On Jan. 30- Feb. 1, compliance investigators from the Northeast Region of the compliance and investigations division of Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit (OIEA) and the Office of Field Operations Buffalo area employees staffed a USDA booth at the Western New York Farm Show with Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) Plant Protection and Quarantine employees and U.S. Custom and Border Patrol (CBP) agriculture specialists.

The event was organized to bring local farmers together with the services necessary for their daily operations and to educate them about the latest agricultural products, technology and government services. FSIS personnel explained their roles and responsibilities, answered questions and provided food safety information.



Pictured, from left: Consumer Safety Inspector Teresa Forzisi, Tom Stancliffe (CBP Agricultural Canine Team), Investigator Kari Washburn and Margie Pelczynski (APHIS) at the educational booth. USDA and CBP volunteers not pictured include from FSIS Mark Underberg, Debbie Pohl, Kevin Ingram and Mike Becke; from APHIS, Barry Wilkins; and from CBP, Laura Hayes and Gary Sackett. Photo courtesy of Teresa Forzisi (OIEA) and Margie Pelczynski (APHIS).

POLICY UPDATES

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

- Notice 07-20, Extension of Delayed Implementation of Verification of Revised Appendix A and B
- Notice 08-20, Concur E-Travel System Update – Expense Receipt Requirements
- Notice 09-20, Eligibility of Brazil to Export Raw Intact Beef to the United States

Protecting Food Safety Through Partnerships

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

To improve food safety outcomes, FSIS relies on partnerships with other federal agencies, state and local departments of agriculture, educational institutions and nonprofit organizations.

One of these partner collaborations is the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet), created by FSIS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in response to the 1993 *E. coli* O157 outbreak associated with fast-food hamburgers. FoodNet conducts surveillance for a variety of pathogens including *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* O157 and non-O157 (STECs) through surveys of laboratories, physicians and the general population, as well as through population-based epidemiologic studies.

The collaborative program also includes participation from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and state and local public health departments. Each month, more than 100 people participate on FoodNet Steering Committee calls, with Drs. Sheryl (Sherry) Shaw and Wu San Chen representing FSIS. Dr. Joanna Zablotsky Kufel joins Shaw at annual FoodNet vision meetings, where attendees review program accomplishments and challenges from the previous year, discuss ongoing activities and priorities for the upcoming year, and define long-term areas of work for FoodNet. Said Shaw, "Participating in FoodNet Steering Committee calls and vision meetings has given me a tremendous appreciation for the amazing people of FoodNet and the work they do to provide the surveillance, attribution and intervention data used at all levels of government. This data is used in outbreak investigations and food safety policy and prevention efforts." Dr. Zablotsky Kufel also serves as the FSIS co-author for FoodNet's reporting in CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, a resource for physicians, public health practitioners, scientists and educators for timely, reliable and objective public health information and recommendations.

FSIS uses FoodNet data — gathered through surveillance, surveys and studies — to allocate resources and set performance standards and to help inform U.S. food safety policy. For example, FSIS' pathogen reduction performance

standards are tied to reductions in FoodNet incidences. In 2019, FoodNet conducted a survey of approximately 700 laboratories to assess routine testing practices and identify changes over time, including use of Culture-Independent Diagnostic Tests (CIDT) and follow-up cultures. The survey helped determine how often specimens are sent to public health labs for further identification once a pathogen is detected by CIDT. The survey also reported on *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, *Vibrio* and *Yersinia*. FoodNet data about CIDT and follow-up cultures provides context for understanding the effectiveness of FSIS policies on reducing pathogens and protecting public health.

FSIS, CDC and FDA established the Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration (IFSAC) in 2011. IFSAC coordinates analyses from the three federal agencies on foodborne illness source attribution, to work collectively to analyze and share data and to monitor progress toward the goal of preventing foodborne illness. FSIS uses IFSAC attribution outputs in a variety of ways, including Agency risk assessments, which support the development of pathogen reduction performance standards.

IFSAC has a senior level steering committee that includes Dr. Zablotsky Kufel and FSIS' Office of Public Health Science Deputy Assistant Administrator Capt. Kis Robertson Hale, a U.S. Public Health Service officer. IFSAC also maintains a robust technical workgroup. The workgroup includes eight staff-level FSIS participants, identifies priority needs for each individual agency and develops proposals to support the proposed projects. Each proposal is reviewed and voted on by the steering committee, which monitors the projects. Each agency provides input on major decisions and reviews all projects.

IFSAC publishes an annual attribution report that provides harmonized foodborne illness source attribution estimates for use across the federal government. IFSAC members have received national recognition of their work, presenting findings at numerous conferences, including International Association

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH



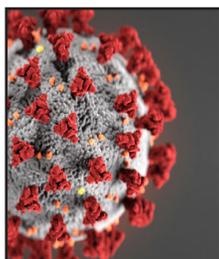
After leading FSIS as Administrator since 2017, Carmen Rottenberg has said goodbye to FSIS. Her federal service spans two decades, and she is returning to the private sector.

“My colleagues in FSIS are among the best and brightest in federal government,” said Rottenberg. “They are public servants in the truest form of the term. It’s been a thrill and absolute joy to work with this team, and I’m so proud of all we have accomplished.”

Paul Kiecker is now the FSIS Administrator, having moved from his role as Deputy Administrator. See page 1.

On March 9, Kiecker presented Rottenberg with a USDA helmet inscribed with a note from Secretary Sonny Perdue: *Thanks for a job WELL DONE, Boss Lady! — Sonny Perdue*
Photo by Carol Blake, OPACE.

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)



Get the latest updates on the novel coronavirus disease as they become available. FSIS employees can go to two USDA websites: <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus> has information on USDA actions and updates and <https://www.dm.usda.gov/beprepared/>.

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Under Secretary's Column

for our country to maintain a presence at international food safety meetings. As the top food safety official in the United States, I represent our vision to world leaders to help ensure that, globally, science drives food safety.

I’m excited about the relationships we’re building and leveraging to positively affect public health. Continue to champion this effort with me and go the extra mile to ensure our relationships are strong and ready for action.

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Faces of Food Safety

Promoting Food Safety

When speaking with friends and family about food safety, Medina often gets questions regarding the modernization of inspection systems. She enjoys educating them, sharing that she was part of the pilot to modernize poultry production through HIMP and, later, the plant was one of the first to implement NPIS. She also shares how the Agency is modernizing inspection in swine production and looking at beef modernization in the future. As industry changes, the Agency uses science and data to inform decisions about modernizing inspection processes and to provide oversight in the most effective way possible. Medina reflects, “I am glad that I joined the Agency when I did because I have a full understanding of traditional inspection in all species, and now I am learning the new inspection systems. Since I was involved with the implementation of NPIS for a couple of years, I was asked to travel to some other plants to assist in the implementation and training the inspection team.”

Her job as an SPHV provides Medina the work-life balance that allows her to spend time with Jonathan Medina, her high school sweetheart and husband, and their 3-year-old twin girls, Kaia and Kailyn. Other interests include CrossFit, weightlifting and other fitness activities. She is very passionate about eating less processed foods, minimizing sugar consumption and teaching her daughters how to be healthy.

“I boast all the time about everything the Agency offers: good work-life balance, great benefits, jobs nationwide and jobs in many different disciplines,” said Medina. When asked what kind of person should consider a career in food safety, Medina responded, “Anyone who is passionate about helping others.”

Pathogen Profile: *Clostridium Botulinum*

By Spencer Pretecrum, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-1215

With spring starting to arrive, many people will want to eat the remaining canned goods left over from the winter. Unfortunately, *Clostridium (C.) botulinum*, the cause of botulism, can be lurking in homemade foods that have been improperly canned, preserved or fermented. Though uncommon, store-bought foods can also be contaminated with *C. botulinum* toxin.

What is Botulism?

Botulism is a foodborne illness that affects the body's nervous system, causing paralysis. A person is infected by the ingestion of one of the potent neurotoxins produced by *C. botulinum*. This neurotoxin is among the most toxic substances known; even microscopic amounts can cause illness. *C. botulinum* are rod-shaped bacteria. They live and grow in low-oxygen conditions. The bacteria form protective spores when conditions for their survival are poor. The spores are often found in seafood and on the surfaces of fruits and vegetables. The toxin is most commonly formed when food is improperly canned at home. *C. botulinum* cannot grow below a pH of 4.6, so acidic foods, such as most fruits, tomatoes and pickles, can be safely processed in a water bath canner. However, foods with a higher pH (most vegetables and meats) must be processed under pressure. Therefore, a pressure cooker should be used. The pressure cooker will reach high enough temperatures to destroy the spores.

How to Prevent Botulism

There are several ways to avoid contracting botulism. The control of foodborne botulism is based almost entirely on heating the spores or inhibiting spore growth.

- Use the recommended heating processes for home-canned foods, such as pressure-canning low-acid foods.
- Boil at least 10 minutes prior to serving.
- Refrigerate all leftovers and cooked foods within 2 hours after cooking (1 hour if the temperature is above 90 °F).

- Discard all swollen, gassy and spoiled canned foods. Double-bag cans or jars using plastic bags that are tightly closed. Place the bags in a trash receptacle, not recycling, outside the home. Keep out of reach of humans and pets.
- Do not taste or eat foods from containers that are leaking, have bulges, are swollen, look damaged or cracked or seem abnormal in appearance.
- Do not use products that spurt liquid or foam when the container is opened.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually appear 12-36 hours after eating food contaminated by the neurotoxin, though there have been documented cases that ranged from as early as 4 hours to as late as 8 days. The earlier the symptoms appear, the more serious the illness. Treatment requires quick medical attention and an antitoxin. If you or someone you know has symptoms of botulism, see a doctor or go to the emergency room immediately. The symptoms may include:

- Double vision.
- Blurred vision.
- Drooping eyelids.
- Slurred speech.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Difficulty breathing.
- A thick-feeling tongue.
- Dry mouth.
- Muscle weakness.



Photo courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

...Continued from page 8

Protecting Food Safety Through Partnerships

for Food Protection and Association of Food and Drug Officials national events in 2019. IFSAC members continue to advance methodological techniques, developing new approaches to complex food attribution and incorporating whole genome sequencing into attribution estimates.

Zablotsky Kufel has watched the collaboration with IFSAC grow and strengthen over the years. "Collaborating among several agencies can be challenging, but I think IFSAC has become a model for collaboration in the government and an example of the success that can be had when the different agencies work together to achieve a common goal," she said.

FSIS has collaborated with other federal agencies for decades to improve the food safety system and reduce the burden of foodborne illness in the United States. "FSIS' support of and participation in FoodNet and IFSAC are vital to their success," said Patricia Griffin, M.D., CDC's Enteric Diseases Epidemiology Branch Chief. "This success translates into improved health for all Americans."

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
Alvis, Paul M., CSI	Washington, Ind.	29	Kremer, Cheryl J., CSI	Clarksville, Ark.	27
Bradley, Vickie J., FI-S	Athens, Ga.	20	Langford Jr., Otis W., IT Proj. Mgr.	Washington, D.C.	42
Armwood, Elizabeth F., FI-S	Milford, Del.	34	Mann, Dorothy A., FI-S	Sebastopol, Miss.	24
Campbell, Alvin P., CSI	Fort Smith, Ark.	26	McCord, Gina L., CSI	Hickory, Ky.	21
Clark, Anthony W., CSI	Oakland, Iowa	34	Miville, Dennis F., CSI	Providence, R.I.	22
Colbert, Jane C., CSI	De Queen, Ark.	35	Morrison, Gregory S., CSI	Lima, Ohio	34
DeMott, Greg A., HR Spec.	Bunker Hill, W.Va.	35	Nilges, Susan, FI-PP	Wakefield, Neb.	9
Dunlap, Maurice E., Supply Tech.	St. Louis, Mo.	23	Painter, Charles S., CSI	Collinsville, Ala.	35
Eckrote, Mary D., FI-S	Laurel, Miss.	12	Quimbley, Sharlie M., FI-S	Camilla, Ga.	13
Foster, Wanda S., Prog. Analy.	Beltsville, Md.	33	Redwing Qarei, Ana P., HR Asst.	Minneapolis, Minn.	17
Geddie, Charlotte A., FI-S	Clinton, N.C.	19	Ruth, Betty J., FI-S	Center, Texas	21
Henry, Gary L., CSI	Hurlock, Md.	36	Sloan Jr., Billy W., FI-S	Shelbyville, Tenn.	20
Hodge, Stanley A., SVMO	Teachey, N.C.	33	Stratton, Kerry L., Resource Coord.	Dallas, Texas	9
Johnston, Ronald D., CSO	Honolulu, Hawaii	30	Swenson, Roger L., SVMO	Lincoln, Neb.	18
Kendall, Charles W., FI-S	Guymon, Okla.	36	Tidwell, Gerry G., CSO	Birmingham, Ala.	33
Patricia, Ketterman A., CSI	Moorefield, W.Va.	24			

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Spotlight

Beyond the nutritional requirements, FNS programs use the most up-to-date safety standards to ensure that people of all ages are served wholesome and safe meals. They rely on the science and findings FSIS employs, and their purchasing standards require all participating vendors to not only meet the health and safety requirements set by USDA, but animal welfare requirements, too.

The programs are designed to ensure the food safety and security of vulnerable populations, as well as improve options available to food and benefit recipients. The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children and adults who are enrolled for care at participating childcare centers, day care homes, and adult day care centers. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, 4.7 million people received program meals and snacks on an average day.

The National School Lunch Program operates in public and nonprofit private schools, as well as residential childcare institutions. More than 29.4 million children participated in the program in FY 2019. The School Breakfast Program provides reimbursement to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential childcare institutions. Around 14.6 million children participated in the program in FY 2019. The Summer Food Service Program reimburses program operators who serve free healthy meals and snacks to low-income youth. In 2018, the program provided meals to 2.7 million children each day at 47,795 sites during the program's peak month of July.

Other well-known FNS programs that reach millions of people are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). They provide nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move toward self-sufficiency. In FY 2019, more than 34 million people were helped by SNAP and 6.4 million by WIC. FNS administers several other nutrition programs. To learn more about FNS and these programs, visit www.fns.usda.gov.

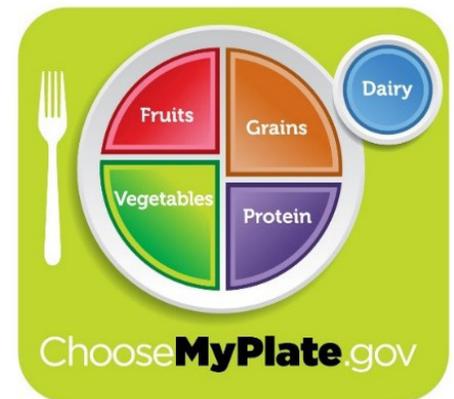


Photo courtesy of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP).



RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

February 8

Family Traditions Meat Company recalls ready-to-eat meat stick products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen.

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

FSIS Leadership Wants to Hear from You

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

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

Your Feedback is Important

Send us comments and successes.

-  Resource sharing
-  Teamwork
-  Solutions



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

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

Employee Assistance Program

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and the Federal Occupational Health's (FOH) Worklife4You program are valuable tools in helping employees balance their work and home life and manage life issues as they arise. FSIS employees and their families may contact the EAP and Worklife4You, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for free and confidential assistance and referral services for help with relationship, family, emotional and alcohol or drug issues, to name a few. FOH offers several other services.

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

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

FSIS employees and applicants for employment wishing to file an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint must first contact an EEO Counselor by calling (301) 504-7755 or 1-800-269-6912, or writing to the FSIS Civil Rights Division at USDA/FSIS, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Building 1, Room 2260, Mail Drop 5261, Beltsville, MD 20705. Contact must be made with an FSIS EEO Counselor within 45 calendar days of the date of the matter alleged to be discriminatory or, in the case of a personnel action, within 45 calendar days of the effective date of the personnel action.