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## Tell Us Your FSIS Stories and Snapshots!

Send articles and photos to [Beacon@usda.gov](mailto: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

May 2020

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

## Keeping You and Our Food Supply Safe

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

FSIS employees are rising to the challenge of verifying food safety and keeping the food supply chain robust and functional during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We will continue working to do everything we can to protect our employees while maintaining inspection services to meet our food safety mission," FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker told employees at an April 29 town hall meeting. "The FSIS response to the pandemic would not be successful without your input," said Kiecker, "Keep sending in your questions and do what you can to stay safe."

Communication continues through town hall meetings and email via [FSISfeedback@usda.gov](mailto:FSISfeedback@usda.gov). New and updated information and guidance continues to come to the Agency rapidly. FSIS user notices are distributed as quickly as possible once new information is available, then highlighted in the town hall meetings. FSIS has also updated its employee information webpage, [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees), so eAuthentication or other login is not required.

These channels of communication are more vital now than ever. Employees continue to ask thoughtful questions, offer constructive suggestions and identify new issues through submission of items to the FSIS feedback mailbox. The average number of participants in the town hall meetings is more than 1,700 per week, and more than 550 emails were received as of May 18. The most often raised issues and concerns have been leave and leave coding, hazard pay, personal protective equipment and social distancing.

*The Beacon* provided frequently asked questions and employee suggestions in the April issue. Thank you for continuing to ask questions, raise concerns and provide suggestions. What follows are updates to previous answers, as well as some new questions and concerns.

### Leave and Leave Codes

Please see the article on page 2 regarding FSIS implementation of the entitlements under the Families First Coronavirus Recovery Act. The article includes information from a user notice issued on May 5 that is available on the FSIS employee page at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees).

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Supplies

Many of you sent suggestions about ways the Agency could access face masks (aka, surgical masks), face coverings or hand sanitizer to purchase. Office of Management (OM) employees diligently ran down and researched every option, lead and suggestion received about where FSIS could procure PPE to see if it was a viable option.

### Face Coverings, Masks and Shields

The Agency has cloth face coverings and disposable face masks available for order through the Material Management Service Center (MMSC). This supply is sufficient to allow In-Plant Personnel (IPP) to choose which covering they prefer.

We expect that all employees wear a face covering at work every day. This means putting it on as you enter the establishment and taking it off as you

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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.

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

Paul Kiecker	Soumaya Tohamy
Terri Nintemann	Pete Bridgeman
Karen Hunter	Carol Blake
Atiya Khan	Aaron Lavallee
Jeremy "Todd" Reed	Carlynn Cockrum*
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Hany Sidrak	*acting

# Families First Coronavirus Response Act and FSIS

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

On March 18, 2020, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) was passed by Congress and signed into law by the President. This act responds to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing several types of benefits including paid sick leave. The Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) provision requires the government to provide additional paid sick leave for specific reasons related to COVID-19, known as EPSLA leave. FSIS employees could be entitled to benefits including up to 80 hours of paid sick leave at their regular pay rate or, in some cases, two-thirds of their pay rate. This includes part-time and intermittent employees.

FFCRA entitlements, such as the 80 hours EPSLA leave, are effective from April 1 until the employee's qualifying circumstance ceases, but only through December 31, 2020. An employee may use EPSLA retroactively to April 1, 2020, but only to replace leave without pay (LWOP) that was previously taken. The only exception to this rule is if the employee used accrued leave (annual, sick, credit, comp) in-lieu of emergency paid sick leave, while waiting on administrative guidance. To use the leave retroactively, employees will need to submit a corrected T&A.

An employee must meet one of the six qualifications specified by the FFCRA to qualify for the leave benefit. A qualifying employee must be:

1. Subject to a Federal, State or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19,
2. Advised by a healthcare provider to self-quarantine related to COVID-19,
3. Experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and is seeking a medical diagnosis,
4. Caring for an individual subject to an order described in Qualification 1 or self-quarantine as described in Qualification 2,
5. Caring for his or her child (as defined in Office of Management and Budget guidance) whose school or place of care is closed (or childcare provider is unavailable) due to COVID-19 related reasons, or
6. Experiencing other substantially similar condition as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (As of May 5, none has been specified.)

Depending on the circumstances, EPSLA leave is paid at:

- 100 percent of an employee's pay (up to \$511 daily or \$5,110 total) if the employee qualifies under Qualification 1, 2 or 3, and
- Two-thirds of pay (up to \$200 daily or \$2,000 total) if the employee qualifies under Qualification 4, 5 or 6.

Employees who exceed the cap will receive a bill from the National Finance Center. Some qualifications require documentation to receive the benefit, so keep related notes or records. For example, the name of the government entity requiring quarantine, documentation of a positive test or diagnosis, or the name of the closed daycare provider or school district. The user notice was a checklist for supervisors to use when receiving these requests and WebTA guidance. More information related to COVID-19 is available on the FSIS Employees webpage at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees).

## Under Secretary's Column

Our nation has faced unprecedented challenges since mid-March. Leadership within FSIS and USDA is working in lock step with other federal and state partners to ensure that America's food supply chain is robust and functional. FSIS also remains committed to our essential mission of verifying the



**Dr. Mindy Brashears**

safety of meat, poultry and processed egg products. I am well aware that our mission would be impossible to fulfill without the dedication of our employees.

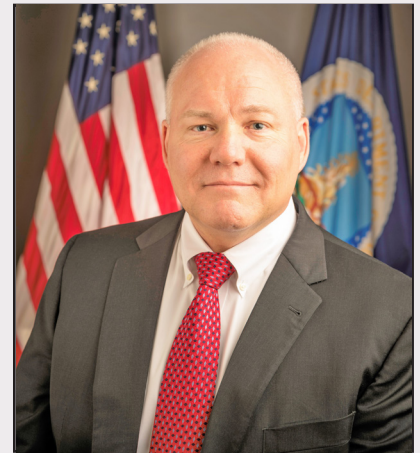
The first week of May is Public Service Recognition Week, and I want to take this time to recognize FSIS employees for their efforts. During Public Service Recognition Week, we take time to appreciate our employees and their commitment to providing safe food to Americans.

The nation's food supply is a critical part of our infrastructure, and as an FSIS employee, you each play a significant role. I want to recognize and publicly thank those who have continuously reported to duty, often working long hours and taking on other shifts. I also want to recognize and thank those who continue to find creative ways to social-distance, practice proper handwashing or make face coverings for colleagues. Employees who work in our labs, district offices, import houses and headquarters offices have also put in long hours over the past six to eight weeks, often doing so outside of scheduled work hours, in support of our shared food safety mission. Thank you for working together as one team and one USDA to serve the American public.

The public service and commitment to public health that FSIS employees have demonstrated across the country have not gone unnoticed. What you do each day has allowed Americans to continue to put safe and wholesome food on their dinner tables. I salute each and every one of you during Public Service Recognition Week and, as always, thank you for your service and commitment to food safety.

## Administrator's Column

Over the last few months, all our lives have transformed in ways that we never could have imagined. While these changes have been challenging, we can often find silver linings in this situation. For me, I deeply appreciate hearing from our field personnel about their concerns,



**Paul Kiecker**

experiences and questions related to COVID-19. The majority of my 32-year career with FSIS was spent in the field, which has given me perspective on what it means to work the front lines and the ability to understand the situations and challenges you face. Our organization is made up of thousands of kindhearted, clever and thoughtful employees, and it is truly a privilege to serve with you.

As the current situation continues to evolve, we are working hard to bring you the latest guidelines and information to do your jobs safely. Simultaneously, we each have a responsibility to do everything we can to stay safe. I encourage you to focus on the aspects of your life at home and at work that you can control — be aware of your distance from other people, wash your hands frequently and wear a face covering in public. You can continue to bring your specific concerns forward to your supervisor. And please, continue to send questions, stories and suggestions to [FSISFeedback@usda.gov](mailto:FSISFeedback@usda.gov).

USDA and FSIS celebrated Public Service Recognition Week at the beginning of May. The dedication of our employees and their commitment to public service has never been more obvious than now. The American public sees and appreciates the work you do every day and, particularly during this time, understands the vital role you play in ensuring a safe food supply. Thank you for what you do every day.

leave. (Of course, you will need to remove the face covering to eat.) Employees are required to wear the face coverings properly — covering both the nose and the mouth — while at work. Supervisors will be enforcing requirements.

IPP should order four face coverings per employee that do not have coverings provided by an establishment. The disposable face masks are also available to order, and IPP should order enough for two per day for every workday, over a 30-day period. IPP who have patrol assignments should be allotted a sufficient supply of disposable face masks to be able to change masks when they move between establishments. See the user notices or the FSIS employee page at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees) for more specifics about ordering.

We are requiring industry to supply inspectors with face coverings when they are providing them for their own employees. If the establishment where you work is providing face coverings to FSIS employees, you should use those supplies and follow its protocols for wear. Otherwise, you should order from the supply center.

FSIS has authorized a one-time reimbursement to all FSIS employees who are required to perform FSIS duties outside of their residence up to \$50 for the purchase of face coverings or materials to make face coverings. Specific instructions on how to claim reimbursement are provided in FSIS Notice 19-20, sent in an April 9 user notice. Employees will be expected to list their actual expenses on the claim form. **Claims must be submitted by July 31, 2020.**

The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued extensive guidance to industry that addresses using face coverings in meat and poultry establishments entitled, “Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers: Interim Guidance from CDC and OSHA.” A link to the guidance is available on the FSIS website’s employee page at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees). The guidance notes that face shields can prevent spread of droplets and will avoid the problem of safety glasses that fog up when wearing a face covering. Face shields can also be worn over face coverings to help minimize contamination.

The Agency has some available, with additional faceshield expected at the end of the month. Our initial stock of face shields is being prioritized for **food inspectors, consumer safety inspectors or public health veterinarians on slaughter assignments**. As soon as you have access to a face shield, you must wear it when appropriate, in addition to your face covering. **Both are required.** While your individual circumstances may vary, generally, the face shield is required when you’re on the slaughter or processing floor, or otherwise performing your duties. Details on how to order and wear face shields are available in the user notice, also available from the FSIS employees webpage ([www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees)).

The Agency has procured hand sanitizer that should be ordered through MMSC. IPP should begin placing orders immediately. Given the high demand, personnel stationed at larger establishments will have priority to receive supplies.

This product is a liquid hand sanitizer and spray bottles will be necessary to dispense it for employee use. The sanitizer will arrive in one-gallon containers and should be transferred to spray bottles using a funnel. FSIS ordered 32 oz. spray bottles and funnels, and the Agency expects them to be available by the end of the month to order. Purchase card holders are authorized to buy a sufficient number of spray bottles and funnels locally to enable FSIS employees within their respective establishments to begin using the product as soon as possible. Details are available on the FSIS employee page at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees).

### Sanitizing Wipes

Please work with your supervisor and district office to request the items you need and to see if they can be purchased using a government purchase card. If they cannot be purchased that way, employees can request authorization from their Frontline Supervisor or district office to purchase the items themselves and, once approved, fill out Form 1164 to request a reimbursement.

### Workers’ Compensation Claims

Federal employees who develop COVID-19 while performing their duties are entitled to file a claim for workers’ compensation coverage pursuant to the Federal Employees’ Compensation Act. Federal agencies process workers’ compensation claims through the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). DOL recently revised its guidance about claims filed related to COVID-19 and created new procedures to specifically address COVID-19 claims. Information is also available through a link on the FSIS employees’ webpage at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees).

Specific procedures for FSIS employees were issued in a user notice on April 21. Employees filing a claim for workers’ compensation coverage as a result of contracting COVID-19 should file Form CA-1, Notice of Traumatic Injury, through FSIS’ Workers’ Compensation Team at [AskWorkersComp@usda.gov](mailto:AskWorkersComp@usda.gov). Form CA-1 can be obtained from your supervisor, district office or the DOL website at [www.dol.gov/owcp/dfec/regs/compliance/forms.htm](http://www.dol.gov/owcp/dfec/regs/compliance/forms.htm). Employees should work with their supervisors during the claims process as usual. If you have questions, email [AskWorkersComp@usda.gov](mailto:AskWorkersComp@usda.gov).

DOL will accept claims from employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 as supported by medical documentation when exposure to the virus likely occurred during the performance of their official duties. DOL will request from the employee a factual statement and any available evidence concerning exposure. FSIS will also be expected to provide DOL with any information regarding the alleged exposure to validate the circumstances surrounding the claim. If there is a causal relationship between the contracting of



# Terri Nintemann Appointed Deputy Administrator

By Felicia Thompson

Phone: (202) 603-2150

Terri Nintemann was appointed Deputy Administrator for FSIS in April 2020. In this role, Nintemann assists the Administrator with overseeing FSIS' public health mission and leading a dedicated team of employees. These efforts directly support the Agency's Strategic Goals 1. Prevent Foodborne Illness and Protect Public Health; 2. Modernize Inspection Systems, Policies, and the Use of Scientific Approaches; and 3. Achieve Operational Excellence.

Nintemann has held several senior leadership roles in FSIS since she joined the Agency in 2003. She most recently served as the Acting Deputy Administrator from March 2020 to April 2020. Prior to this role, she was the Assistant Administrator for the Office of Policy and Program Development, leading the development of Agency policies, including regulations, instructions to the field, and guidance to industry. Previously, Nintemann was the Assistant Administrator for the Office of Planning, Analysis and Risk Management, the Office of Data Integration and Food Protection and the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education.

In her career at FSIS, Nintemann spearheaded efforts to modernize the Agency's use of data, analytical tools and analysis and sharing of data with employees and stakeholders. She enhanced collaboration and strengthened partnerships at all levels. Nintemann also led and managed the FSIS enterprise

governance process, a corporate approach to decision making, ensuring it continued to evolve as the process and structure matured.

Before joining FSIS, Nintemann was a professional staff member and legislative director for the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. She also served as a Legislative Director in the House of Representatives and a Legislative Assistant in the U.S. Senate.



Nintemann's passion for public service is rooted in her participation in FFA and 4-H as a young adult. She earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Animal Science and a minor in Ag Economics from the University of Minnesota.

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*...Continued from page 4*

COVID-19 and the work performed, and if the CA-1 is filed within 30 days, then the employee is eligible to receive Continuation of Pay for up to 45 days. DOL will make a decision on a case-by-case basis.

## **Industry Reporting of Employees with COVID-19 Positive Diagnosis and Social Distancing**

FSIS receives its authority to regulate food safety from Congress. Enforcing CDC recommendations for COVID-19 or mandating reporting of illnesses falls outside of FSIS regulatory jurisdiction; however, FSIS has been consistent and clear with industry that the expectation is that they should follow CDC recommendations to slow the spread of COVID-19 and inform FSIS of cases of COVID-19 among their employees. FSIS will inform industry of positive findings of FSIS personnel so that each entity can make informed decisions regarding employee health and safety. The Agency is in regular communication with the industry, including holding bi-weekly phone calls, during which FSIS is emphasizing this information.

The CDC/DOL guidance to industry (see above) includes reporting confirmed COVID-19 cases to inspectors. "If a worker is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform anyone they have come into contact with (including fellow workers, inspectors,

## ***Keeping You and Our Food Supply Safe***

graders, etc.) of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace, but should maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act." A link to the full guidance is available on the FSIS website's employee page at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees).

The guidance includes ways for how industry can configure their work environments to increase spacing between employees. These include modifying workstations and installing physical barriers, such as strip curtains, plexiglass, or dividers from similar materials. FSIS regulations dictate that FSIS inspectors should have at least four feet (for the stand in poultry), five feet (for head and rail positions in red meat plants) and eight feet (for viscera table) of floorspace. Use and manage the space provided. Inspection personnel know these requirements, but FSIS needs to enforce this and emphasize that this space also helps maintain social distancing.

# \*SNAPSHOTS FROM

\* Several of the events and photos featured in this section are from events before recommendations and rules for social distancing were in place. Please continue to use best practices and recommendations to stay safe.



## **Liberal, Kans.**

On May 11, food inspectors Jared Hansen (pictured: left) and Hermilo Lopez “practice” social distancing in the breakroom at Establishment 208A. The idea of the photo was to provide some comic relief during the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficult time of restrictions. The shield does not replace face coverings. To be effective, both inspectors would wear the face coverings over the mouth and nose, as does Lopez. The shields were provided by the establishment for use in the cafeteria and break rooms, including the USDA break room, where there were too many people and not enough space to practice effective social distancing.

Food inspectors Jared Hansen and Hermilo Lopez play out a fist bump parody of social distancing. Photo by Long Tran, OFO.

# THE FIELD\*

## College Park, Md.

FSIS understands the importance of training its employees on the latest techniques and soft skills necessary to lead the Agency's approximately 9,000 staff members. From March 9-13, supervisors completed the FSIS Experienced Supervisor Training Program. The Program's focus helped experienced supervisors learn new leadership techniques, refine current skills, as well as meet their annual training requirement. [USDA Departmental Regulation 4040-412-002](#) defines experienced supervisors as permanent, full-time federal employees responsible for delivering at least one employee's performance review and have over a year in a supervisory position.



Agency leaders took part in the FSIS Experienced Supervisor Training gather for a group photo at the conclusion of the weeklong session. Pictured, front row, from left: Dennis Raben, Craig Seletzky, Tracy Bryant, Thomas Collaro, Paul Pomes, Dawn Walters, Ryan Lundquist, Cassie N. Rizzo, William Okeke, Donald J. McDonald and Julie Smith. Pictured, second row, from left: Debra Rudd, Bimla Laura and Saeed Qureshi. Pictured, back row, from left: Evelyne Mbandi, Vaughn Taylor-Lehman, Lauren Entes, Darryl C. Carter, Scott Ehle, Laurence Toyer, Sarah Pattillo, Jonathan Klemme, Jessica Johnson Wallis, Warren Wong, Ricky Couch, Suh Niba, Jimmy L. Rose, Sheryl R. Talley, Debra Halteman, Raul Robles, Raymond Andress, Jacki Nelson, Jeffrey Fetrow, Dr. William P. Rogers, Mark Godinez, Erica L. Akins, Muhammad Qadir, Martha Mendez, Brian Fong, Jaclynn Gilbert, Amanda Krot, Valerie Goeman and Connor Elliott. Not pictured are Cindy Buck-Griffin and Nathan Greenwell. Photo by Brien Aho, OEED.



(Pictured, from left) Dr. Elsa Murano, former Under Secretary for Food Safety and Texas A&M University's Borlaug Institute President Emerita and professor, current Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears, and DeAnn Liska, Texas A&M Vice Chancellor of Strategic Initiatives, gather for a photo during the event. Photo by Dr. Phil Bronstein, OFO.

## College Station, Texas

On March 5, Office of Food Safety Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, center) presented her 2020 vision "Focus on the Future: The Vision for the Year Ahead in Food Science Technologies and Methods" at Texas A&M University's Norman Borlaug Institute to a gathering of 50 students. Originally founded in 1984 as the Office of International Programs, the Borlaug Institute was renamed in 2006 and continues to carry on and expand the legacy of its namesake – the late Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Norman E. Borlaug – by playing a key role in fighting world hunger and poverty in developmental countries through agricultural science.



# POLICY UPDATES

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

- Notice 17-20, FY2020 Continuing Education Program for Public Health Veterinarians
- Notice 18-20, Covid-19 Funding Use for Payroll and Travel
- Notice 19-20, Use of Protective Face Coverings to Reduce the Spread of Covid-19
- Notice 20-20, Sampling Supplies to Include Non-Sterile Examination Gloves
- Directive 4410.5, Student Loan Repayment Program for In-Plant Veterinary Medical Officers
- Directive 10,400.1, Sample Collection from Cattle Under the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) Ongoing Surveillance Program - Revision 1

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## A Call for Emerging Food Safety Issues

By Veronica Pegram-Williams, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-7887

FSIS employees are in a great position to identify potential gaps in food safety, and the Hazard Identification Team (HIT) wants to hear from you. Those of you on the front lines — food inspectors, consumer safety inspectors, frontline supervisors, enforcement investigations and analysis officers (EIAO), and public health veterinarians (PHV) — are the eyes and ears of FSIS and are especially encouraged to reach out to HIT about potential emerging risks. Any FSIS employee is welcome to submit though.

Since 2014, HIT has been a resource for FSIS employees concerned about food safety issues that may not be addressed by existing policy. These issues may stem from new practices in the field or may represent emerging risks reported in recent literature, conferences or the media. HIT Coordinators and the HIT Steering Committee assess reported risks and advise Agency leadership on further actions by tracking, evaluating and prioritizing the reported food safety issues. Past submissions have resulted in the formation or involvement of task forces, scientific seminars and guidance for industry.

In one situation, an EIAO in the Office of Field Operations submitted an HIT issue on chronic wasting disease as a potential zoonotic (whether it can be transferred between animals and humans) disease. A task force was assigned, resulting in educational seminars from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and consultations with subject matter experts, which allowed FSIS personnel to better understand the disease. If you would like to read more about previously submitted HIT issues, see the HIT post on USDA Connect's One Health blog - go to <https://connections.usda.gov/forums>, then type "HIT" in the search oval on the right near the magnifying glass and the post will be the first search result (USDA eAuthentication login required).

The team consists of three coordinators and the steering committee. The coordinators each represent a different discipline

in the Office of Public Health Science (OPHS). Carrie Schmidt, V.M.D., is a veterinary pathologist, Randolph Duverna, Ph.D., is a chemist and CDR William Lanier, D.V.M., is an epidemiologist. Schmidt and Lanier have worked in establishments as PHVs. Randolph has spent five years evaluating residue-related issues. Their experience and training has prepared them to evaluate, discuss and recommend practical resolutions to potential emerging issues. The HIT Steering Committee is comprised of OPHS directors and is chaired by the OPHS Assistant Administrator or her designee. The committee provides additional expertise for determining how the potential risk will be handled.

### Submit to HIT

Submit any issue that could pose a risk to public health or compromise the food supply. There might be a trend you have observed or an emerging hazard that isn't addressed by current FSIS policy. If you are unsure if an issue can be handled by HIT, reach out to the coordinators and they will be happy discuss the issue and decide if HIT is the right fit.

Email food safety issues to the HIT Coordinators at [HazardIdentificationTeam@usda.gov](mailto:HazardIdentificationTeam@usda.gov). One of the coordinators will send you an HIT submission form to complete and return by email. A coordinator may contact you to discuss the issue in more detail.



# OEED CAREER/TRAINING CORNER

## The IPP, PHIS and Supervisor Help Resources

By Michael Walton, OEED

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Help Resources provide a self-service training portal that enables employees to independently explore and experience short bursts of training. The “Help Buttons” include PHIS, IPP and Supervisor Help and are open to all FSIS employees.

PHIS Help includes hands-on help for Domestic, Exports and Imports related tasks. The most popular topics on PHIS Help are (1) Score Guide, (2) Domestic ADR Guide, (3) Selecting Poultry and Raw Products Groups and (4) User Guide and Managing Establishment Sorting Records Guide.

IPP Help includes Sampling Project Guidance, Poultry Carcass Disposition, HACCP, Food Defense Basics, system tutorials, job competency refreshers and more. Popular topics include (1) Multi-Species Disposition, (2) Sampling, (3) Media Library, (4) Job Competencies and (5) Virtual Plant Tours.

Supervisor Help includes Discerning Poor Performance Conduct, Maneuvering Common Conflicts, Supervisor

Performance Standards, Commonly Used Forms, Hearing Conservation, Reasonable Accommodations and more. Popular topics are: (1) Professional Competencies, (2) Frequently Used Government Forms, (3) Performance Management and (4) Government Vehicle Misuse Supervisory Training.

Help Resources feature interactive features, scenario-based animations and quizzes, frequently asked questions and illustrated how-to's.

With IPP and Supervisor Help, you decide what information to consult and how much time to spend with the material. You can find all Help Resources on the FSIS Applications menu on the Start button. The direct Help links are:

- (PHIS) [phishelp.fsis.usda.gov/phishelp/phishelp.htm](https://phishelp.fsis.usda.gov/phishelp/phishelp.htm),
- (IPP) [fsishelp.fsis.usda.gov/ipphelp/](https://fsishelp.fsis.usda.gov/ipphelp/),
- (Supervisor) [fsishelp.fsis.usda.gov/supervisorhelp/](https://fsishelp.fsis.usda.gov/supervisorhelp/).

## Inspection Methods Course Transitions to Online

By Laura Reiser, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-7894

As mentioned in the April 2020 Beacon, during a recent town hall call, an employee suggested that FSIS should consider conducting training remotely. The Agency responded that the shift to online learning had already begun, starting with the final week of required training for public health veterinarians (PHV) that started on March 30.

The first full course to be conducted remotely, the Inspection Methods (IM) training offered by the Office of Employee Experience and Development (OEED), is taken by newly promoted or newly hired consumer safety inspectors (CSI) and PHVs. It covers the essential FSIS inspection duties in those jobs. (For more information, see [www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/inspection/workforce-training/regional-on-site-training/inspection-methods/inspection-methods](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/inspection/workforce-training/regional-on-site-training/inspection-methods/inspection-methods).) The new remote version of the full class takes two weeks and covers all course objectives. It streamlines the topic discussions, starts on Monday instead of Tuesday, and replaces Public Health Information System click-by-click practice from the classroom training with a week of on-the-job training and supplementary simulations.

Transitioning IM training to remote learning has been an OEED-wide team effort that also involved people from the Office of Field Operations, Office of Policy and Program Development and the Office of the Chief Information Officer. As trainers quickly learned

how to develop e-learning in two different platforms, others in OEED cross-trained colleagues, coordinated external server services, completed equipment set-up, developed electronic testing and coordinated printing study guides.

Trainees are able to borrow training laptops, as well as wireless internet systems if needed. Trainees can ask questions and interact in real time with live instructors. Although the final test to pass the course will still need to be proctored at a specific location, the switch from a classroom-based training model to a remote one enables trainees to carry out as much social distancing as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first remote IM class is scheduled for May 11-22, contact Dr. Hala Bessyoung at (515) 371-5322 or [hala.bessyoung@usda.gov](mailto:hala.bessyoung@usda.gov). OEED will continue developing remote methods for other training as part of the Agency's modernization efforts.

# FACES OF FOOD SAFETY

## Robert Witte, Problem Solver

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

Robert Witte, a Senior Staff Officer with the Policy Development Staff (PDS) in the Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD), has been with FSIS for 14 years. He enjoys identifying and solving problems, traits that serve him well in the Agency.

### Witte's Role in PDS

In PDS, Witte helps plan, develop and draft FSIS instructions for the more than 7,500 field personnel across the country and guidance to more than 6,400 industry establishments nationwide. This includes responding to scientific and regulatory inquiries from internal and external stakeholders that can be complex — scientifically, legally and logistically. Witte's expertise focuses on Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC) in raw beef products, but he never knows what question to expect when he picks up the phone. Said Witte, "I talk with field personnel, industry and the public nearly daily about food safety. Folks can get overwhelmed at times by all the regulatory jargon and scientific studies. When you explain a regulation or food safety principle to someone and know they 'get it,' you can feel their stress lower. It's very rewarding."

Much of Witte's duties include helping fulfill the policy needs of the field and providing FSIS leadership with the information they need. "A lot of what I do day-to-day is simply to solve problems related to policy gaps, Public Health Information System (PHIS) functionality, sample collection and communication breakdowns of all sorts."

While Witte is quick to give credit to people in program areas across FSIS for their work on different initiatives, he has made major contributions to many projects. Witte led the development and implementation of a new Meat and Poultry Inspection Directory webpage. The result combines multiple datasets to show where establishments are located and what they produce. "This was created to enhance customer service and answer common questions we receive through askFSIS," he said. Another recent project includes streamlining internal PHIS sample questionnaires to save field personnel time while also increasing the quality of data gathered. More recently, Witte has been working with peers in FSIS and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to develop CODEX guidance documents for food producers on the international level. The purpose of the project, co-chaired by the U.S. and Chile, is to provide practical ways to minimize STECs in beef slaughter plants and raw beef products.

### Witte's FSIS Career Path

Witte credits a college friend who worked as an egg products inspector for bringing him to FSIS. "I was still in school and started



Witte participating in a meeting with other subject matter experts across offices in FSIS to evaluate data collected from sampling tasks. Pictured (left to right) Jean Mah (OPARM), Witte (OPPD), Stevie Hretz (OPPD) and Jeoffrey Levine (OPHS).

as a student intern inspector with no idea what FSIS did, no food safety experience or any idea what I was getting myself into. The intern schedule worked, and the pay was good, so I jumped in," said Witte.

After working weekends for three and a half years and completing his bachelor's and master's degrees in chemistry, he has since used his experience and education to serve the Agency in numerous roles. He has moved back and forth between the Office of Field Operations, OPPD and the Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit, working on policy development, auditing and data analytics. "Each time I received a promotion, FSIS has been great at providing the technical training I needed for each position." He also credits his success to his mentors, formally or informally. "Whether they all know it or not, there have been many people who have helped me immensely at each stage of my career. They provided honest, sometimes critical feedback and provided me with opportunities to expand my skills."

### OPPD's Policy Development Staff is a Team

Witte feels fortunate to be part of PDS and the OPPD team. Said Witte, "Leadership at each level in OPPD is great — they set the vision and give everyone flexibility for how they carry out the mission. PDS primarily deals with the field inspection-related policy and has a lot of in-plant experience in livestock or poultry slaughter, processing and egg products. PDS includes a bunch of problem solvers who came from the field and truly care about the field and FSIS' mission. None of us has all the answers, so teamwork is critical. Discussion and debate are commonplace at PDS — it's a great team to be a part of." Dr. John Linville, the PDS Director adds, "Bob is not only dedicated to making people's lives better through advancing public health, but also to making the work required to do so more fun for his coworkers."

Witte offers advice to others beginning their FSIS career, "Everyone has to start somewhere, so don't focus on where you are, focus on where you are going." He advises to keep looking

*Continued on page 11...*

# 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
Avelino, Christian, FI-S	Carrollton, Ga.	10	Klapperich, Donna-Marie A., HR Asst	Minneapolis, Minn.	33
Battle, Pearlie B., FI-S	Gadsden, Ala.	14	Laird, Lennie, FI-S	Enterprise, Ala.	26
Bellone, Barbara R., CSI	Heavener, Okla.	32	Myers, Shirrill S., FI-S	Chattanooga, Tenn.	19
Bobek, Dennis D., FI-S	Madison, Neb.	9	Rondell, Rita E., CSI	Yankton, S.D.	27
Britton, Mary L., FI-S	Natchitoches, La.	34	Savage, Richard L., FI-S	Gadsden, Ala.	17
Butler, Barbara S., FI-S	Gadsden, Ala.	24	Tabb, Michael K., FI-S	Live Oak, Fla.	21
Gangestad, Dallas P., FI-PP	Arlington, Ariz.	30	Thornton, Leofina B., SVMOM	Turlock, Calif.	17
Harp, Bruce A., CSI	St. Henry, Ohio	19			

## Washing Hands Prevents Cross-Contamination

By Maribel Alonso, OPACE

Phone: (202) 260-2136

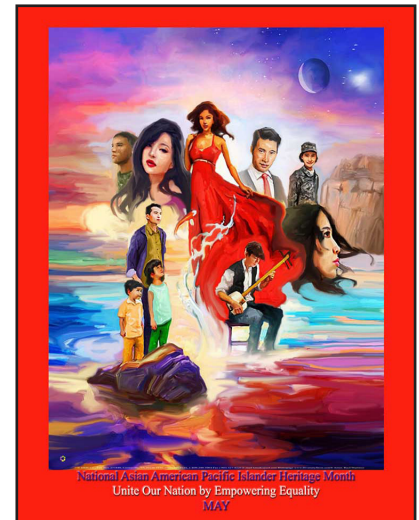
Daily cooking at home has become a new norm for many. Whether cooking old family recipes or experimenting with new ones, understanding and carrying out good handwashing practices – WHEN and HOW to properly wash your hands – is still one of the most effective ways to prevent spreading foodborne viruses and bacteria.

A recent study has identified inadequate handwashing as a contributing factor to foodborne illness. During the first two years of FSIS' observational study, participants did not wash their hands sufficiently nearly 99 percent of the time before and during meal preparations. Find out the most common reasons for unsuccessful handwashing and other results from this study, at the new FSIS webpage, **Handwashing for Food Safety**. This webpage also includes detailed information and a video on how to properly wash hands to control the spread of germs in your kitchen with the goal of keeping families healthy.

Visit **Handwashing for Food Safety** at <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/handwashing>. Don't forget to follow all FOUR KEY STEPS OF FOOD SAFETY: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety>.

## National Asian American and Pacific Islanders Heritage Month

May was designated National Asian American and Pacific Islanders Heritage Month in 1992. The monthlong observance celebrates the culture, traditions, history and significant contributions of immigrants from Asia, the Pacific, the native people of the Pacific Islands and their American descendants. While some of the earliest Asian immigrants arrived from China, Japan, India and Korea, immigration reforms tied to United States civil rights legislation brought even more groups to the United States, such as Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Indonesians, the Hmong and other peoples from South and Central Asia.



...Continued from page 10

for problems and offering solutions, saying "it is amazing how fast you can work yourself into becoming essential. Keep seeking new opportunities. There is little in FSIS that can't be learned. If you have integrity, intelligence and energy, you'll have a great career and be able to positively impact food safety."

### Family and Friends

Witte and his wife, Brooke, son, Brennan (age 9) and daughter, Sydney (age 7) live on a lake in Iowa and enjoy water activities

Faces of Food Safety

in the summer and supporting the University of Nebraska Cornhuskers in the fall. Witte also enjoys working on home improvement projects. He teaches his children about "germs" and general food safety concepts. Given his career, he is often confronted with myths and misperceptions about food safety from friends and family during social events, and he enjoys dispelling the myths and providing common sense ways they can protect themselves from foodborne illness.





## RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

April 10	An Arkansas establishment recalled approximately 130,763 pounds of not ready-to-eat chicken bowl products due to possible foreign matter contamination.
April 10	A Canadian establishment recalled approximately 42,587 pounds of raw pork trimmings due to product being produced without benefit of import inspection.
For more information, go to <a href="http://www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls">www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls</a> .	

## 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](mailto: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 summer 2020 issue by June 1. Email submissions to [FSISConnections@usda.gov](mailto: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](mailto:Laura.Reiser@usda.gov) or (202) 720-7894, or Felicia Thompson at [Felicia.Thompson@usda.gov](mailto:Felicia.Thompson@usda.gov) or (202) 603-2150.

## Employee Assistance Program

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

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

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

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