

Food Safety and
Inspection Service

Volume Number
27 11

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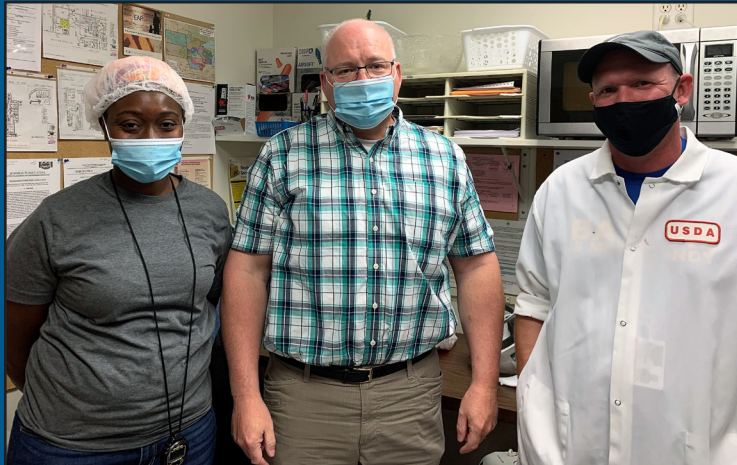
Share Your FSIS Stories and Snapshots!

Send articles and photos to Beacon@usda.gov. Articles must be original works that have been cleared by your supervisor and contain the author's name and contact information. Submissions should not exceed 250 words. *The Beacon* editorial staff will edit submissions for content and length.

High-resolution photos must be submitted as a separate attachment in .jpg format. Provide a media release form for photos of individuals under 18 years of age.

The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY



On Oct. 5-6, Administrator Paul Kiecker was in the Des Moines District to meet with FSIS inspection personnel and thank them for their continued dedication during the pandemic.

On Oct. 6, Kiecker (pictured, center) visited inspectors at Establishment P-579, a turkey slaughter and processing establishment in Faribault, Minnesota. See Snapshots from the Field on page 6 for more photos from Kiecker's visit.

Pictured, from left: Food Inspector Candyce Hutchins, Kiecker and Consumer Safety Inspector Joseph Madaza-Hanson.

Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.

Honoring FSIS Employees at the Highest Level

By Felicia Thompson, OPACE
Phone: (202) 603-2150

FSIS hosted the 2020 Administrator's Awards for Excellence (AAFE) and the Under Secretary's Awards ceremony on Oct. 8. At the virtual gathering, FSIS and the Office for Food Safety (OFS) leadership recognized employees throughout the Agency for supporting the food safety mission with stellar customer service, innovative work projects and other achievements.

Terri Nintemann, FSIS deputy administrator, provided opening remarks. "An AAFE is the most prestigious FSIS award that is presented to an individual or group to recognize exceptional contributions made toward the Agency's strategic goals and mission. We honor them for their excellence in advancing food safety; modernizing FSIS processes; improving workforce engagement, diversity and inclusion, and customer service; and non-supervisory employee and supervisory employee achievement within and outside of FSIS-regulated establishments." The Agency also recognized employees with honorable mentions.

FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker, the event's keynote speaker, followed Nintemann. He presented the Administrator's awards and

explained why each individual or group contribution mattered to the Agency and to the American public.

Kiecker continued, "The AAFE is one of many ways we can recognize employees who have gone above and beyond expectations in supporting the Agency's mission. These awards were created to recognize employee excellence in their efforts to achieve the FSIS public health vision, and working together helps us all succeed."

After the Administrator presented the AAFEs, Nintemann recognized the honorable mentions, and a moment of silence was taken to acknowledge FSIS team members who passed away in the last year.

OFS Under Secretary Dr. Mindy Brashears presented the Under Secretary's Awards for Excellence. Award recipients and honorable mentions are noted below. A recording of the presentation will be available to employees.

Continued on page 4...



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.

Jan. issue – due Dec. 1 Feb. issue – due Jan. 1
Mar. issue – due Feb. 1 Apr. issue – due Mar. 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	Robert Bane
Michelle Catlin	Carlynn Cockrum
Carl Mayes	Frank Mays
Elamin Osman	C. Natalie Lui Duncan
Cara LeConte	Denise Eblen
Michelle Garner	Kis Robertson Hale
Janet Stevens	Rachel Edelstein
Nathan Greenwell	April Regonlinski*
Phil Bronstein	*acting
Hany Sidrak	

Town Hall Round-Up

FSIS employee Town Hall Meetings are live phone conferences hosted by Agency leadership the fourth Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m., 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. Eastern Time. The Beacon will bring you highlights of the previous month's meeting. The next meeting is Dec. 16. See page 12 for details.

October 28 Town Hall Highlights

New and Revised HACCP and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP) Resources. FSIS recently published new and revised resources to help establishments with their HACCP plans and SSOPs. This includes small and very small plants that need their first HACCP plan or to add another plan to their HACCP system; businesses seeking a federal grant of inspection to operate a meat or poultry establishment; and existing establishments that need to create a new HACCP plan or that need guidance when performing a HACCP plan reassessment. The Agency revised the "Guidebook for the Preparation of HACCP Plans," posted three new generic HACCP models and a SSOP model. More models will be posted as they are revised. The guidelines and models are available on the FSIS website at www.fsis.usda.gov/guidance.

More Frequent MPI Directory Updates. We are also making a change to the frequency with which we update data on the Meat, Poultry and Egg Product Inspection Directory, or MPI Directory. FSIS now updates and publishes the Establishment Demographic Data and the MPI Directory weekly to ensure latest establishment information is available to the public.

Consumer Education Efforts. "The work of our employees to educate consumers on how to safely prepare, cook and store FSIS-regulated products builds upon the inspection and verification work that we do in establishments every day and helps to reduce foodborne illness," said Administrator Paul Kiecker. FSIS recently completed its third observational research study, where we observed consumer cooking practices in a test kitchen. This year's research focused on how consumers prepare frozen foods that are not fully cooked. Our study showed that almost a quarter of consumers might not realize that some frozen foods are not ready-to-eat, especially if they have browned breading or grill marks. We're using the findings from these studies to improve our consumer messaging by encouraging consumers to read product labels to understand how to properly prepare an item, and not to rely solely on appearance. FSIS hosted a virtual public meeting, "Food Safety: Consumer Outreach and Education Today and for the Future," on Oct. 6 with presentations from food safety experts in the public and private sectors. More information about the study and materials from the meeting are available at www.fsis.usda.gov/meetings.

Updates

Egg Products Inspection Regulations Final Rule. The finalized rule was published and it will require federally inspected egg products establishments to develop and implement HACCP systems and SSOPs.

Continued on page 12...

Under Secretary's Column

When people think of FSIS, many probably think first about our food inspection responsibilities. It's clear that our in-plant personnel are vital to how we achieve our food safety mission. They are in establishments every day verifying the safety of products that reach consumers at



Dr. Mindy Brashears

grocery store shelves. That said, FSIS has another opportunity to achieve our food safety mission — empowering consumers with the knowledge of safely handling FSIS-regulated products at home. Industry and FSIS work hard to ensure food products are safe, but consumers play an important role in practicing food safety. How consumers choose to handle meat and poultry products can have a direct impact on the number of foodborne illnesses and related hospitalizations and deaths. Ultimately, we want consumers to adopt long-lasting behaviors and safe food-handling practices to keep them and their families safe.

Last month, we hosted a public meeting focused on the future of food safety education. The meeting featured leaders in business, academia, nonprofits and government who shared their ideas and experiences about how and when we can broaden or incorporate food safety messaging into consumers' lives. We know that our food safety messages are competing for attention in a sea of media content, and we want consumers to turn to the sources that share accurate food safety information.

As an FSIS employee, I hope you appreciate the role that you can play as a trusted source of information in your home and community. With the holiday cooking season approaching, there is no better time to share the Agency's food safety tips and resources with your loved ones. You can help practice and teach the food safety behaviors we want everyone to adopt — proper handwashing, using a food thermometer to ensure proper cooking temperatures, and preventing cross-contamination of harmful bacteria. Each of you can be an ambassador for food safety education!

Administrator's Column

As part of our strategic goal to modernize as an agency, I am excited to announce that we have finished distributing electronic devices (eDevices) to employees in all districts. The eDevices are convertible HP EliteBook x360 laptops, which means they can function as



Paul Kiecker

a laptop or tablet. Employees will have access to eDevices during their normal tour of duty. After completing training, every employee will have an FSIS Outlook email account and will be able to access the internet, AgLearn and WebTA. We invested in the eDevices to help employees have ready access to important information and training opportunities.

The eDevice initiative also creates other efficiencies and cost-savings, including a decreased need for manual data entry and, starting in 2021, no need to print and mail paper versions of *The Beacon*, *Employee Connections*, FSIS Directives and Notices, training materials or the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. I encourage employees to share their feedback about eDevices with their supervisors or via the FSIS Employee Feedback inbox at FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

We also continue to modernize our import and export certification processes through government-to-government exchange of electronic certification (eCert), which reduces paper use, improves efficiency and enhances security. We currently receive import eCert data in the Public Health Information System (PHIS) for imports from Australia, the Netherlands and New Zealand, and we are actively seeking more countries to participate. For exports, we have implemented electronic export applications for many countries and are moving toward using digital signatures on export certificates in PHIS.

Your unwavering dedication to our food safety mission is inspiring and makes it possible for FSIS to adapt and modernize. As we head into the Thanksgiving season, I want to tell you how thankful I am for each of you. I'm also grateful for the opportunity to enjoy safe food thanks to the work that you do.

Under Secretary’s Awards and Administrator’s Awards for Excellence

The following individuals and groups received the Administrator’s Award for Excellence and the Under Secretary’s Award, as well as nominated for the Secretary’s Honor Award.

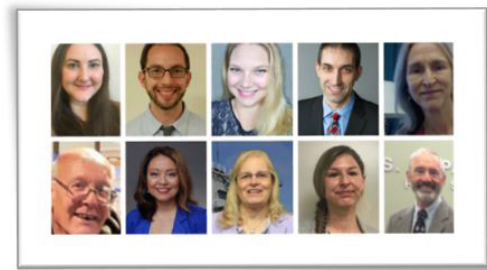
Excellence in Food Safety

The Grand Rapids Circuit, First Shift Inspection Team for exemplary performance and dedication to the FSIS mission by covering multiple assignments along with current duties during a high-stress time period. Pictured, top row, from left: team leader and Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Aamen Blattner, Office of Field Operations (OFO); team members Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Miranda Boomstra, OFO; CSIs Charles Clement and Shai Lyn Donaldson, OFO. Team members, pictured, bottom row, from left: CSIs David Ellefson, Thomas Kersjes and Tim Stonerock, OFO. Team members not pictured are CSIs Kristin Overhiser, Dominic Bushouse and Kenneth Elliott, OFO.



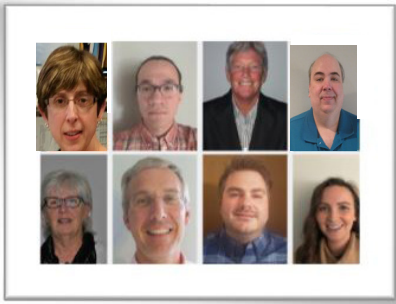
Excellence in Modernization and Innovation

The Swine Slaughter Inspection Team for developing a new inspection system that will facilitate pathogen reduction in pork products, improve animal welfare and make better use of FSIS resources. Pictured, top row, from left: team leader and Deputy Director Melissa Hammar, Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD); team members Supervisory Economist Andrew Pugliese, OPPD; Deputy Director Melanie Abley, OPPD; Senior Data Analyst Scott Seys, Office of Planning, Analysis, and Risk Management; and Program Analyst Lisa Volk, Office of Field Operations (OFO). Team members, pictured on bottom row, from left: Public Health Training Coordinator Michael Sheldon, Office of Employee Experience and Development; Public Affairs Specialist Maria Machuca, Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education; Senior Public Health Specialist Davi LaBarre, Office of Public Health Science; Veterinary Medical Officer Amber Pasko, OFO; and Senior Staff Officer Thomas Vermeersch, OPPD.



Excellence for Operational Improvement

The Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Redesign Team was recognized for the central role in architecting, communicating and leading the implementation of the Agency’s CSI Reclassification initiative. Pictured, top row, from left: team members Resource Management Analyst Kimberley Beall, Office of Field Operations; and Human Resources Specialists (HRS) Jerry Button, Chris Curley and Richard Horton, Office of Management (OM). Team members, pictured on bottom row, from left: HRSs Jean Kern-Regis, Thomas Reimler, John Sweeney and Abigail Woyke, OM. Not pictured are team leader and HRS Heather Schuldt, OM, and team member HRS Jaime Torres, OM.



Excellence in Operational Improvement

The Strategic Assessment of Sampling Resources Team for the development and application of an innovative approach to maximize the impact of FSIS’ sampling resource allocation. Pictured, top row, from left: team leaders Senior Microbiologist Rebecca Fields, Office of Public Health Science (OPHS) and Director Joanna Zablotzky-Kufel, OPHS. Team members, pictured on bottom row, from left: Program Analyst Matthew Gonzales, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, and Jackson Crockett, formerly a lead data analyst in the Office of Planning, Analysis, and Risk Management.



Continued on page 5...

Leader of the Year (Non-In-Plant)

Glenn Tillman for leading staff in the modernization of the microbial characterization efforts, in particular whole genome sequencing, antimicrobial sensitivity testing and molecular serotyping. Tillman is a branch chief in the Office of Public Health Science's Eastern Laboratory Microbiology Characterization Branch in Athens, Georgia.

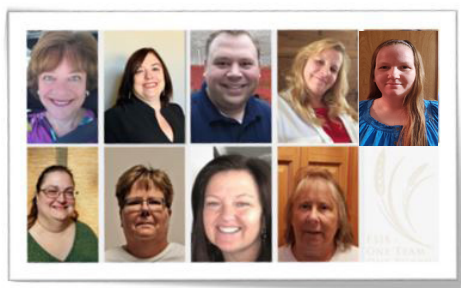


Administrator's Awards

The following individuals and groups received the Administrator's Award for Excellence.

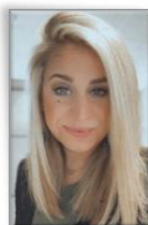
Excellence in Customer Service

The Financial Service Center Team for tireless efforts to ensure FSIS employees received pay during and after the longest federal government shut down in history and their inspiring commitment to the FSIS community. Pictured, top row, from left: team leaders Supervisory Financial Systems Analysts Julie Hove and Christina Mercer, Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO); team members Financial Specialist Matthew Didday, OCFO; Financial Program Specialists Dee Finnell and Rebecca Johnson, OCFO. Team members, pictured, bottom row, from left: Financial Program Specialist Tammy Parker, OCFO; Senior Financial Systems Analyst Lori Requist, OCFO; Supervisory Financial Systems Analyst Karen Sommer, OCFO; and Financial Program Analyst Joanne Swesey, OFO.



Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion

Kimberly Kelley for championing diversity and inclusivity as key components of the FSIS public health mission, while serving as the LGBTQ+ Special Emphasis Program Manager. Kelley is a senior training and program analysis specialist in the Office of Employee Experience and Development in Washington, D.C.



Employee of the Year (In-Plant)

Cynthia Jenkins for significant contributions to food safety through leadership and guidance to others. Jenkins is a consumer safety inspector in the Office of Field Operations at Establishment P-18557 in Summit, Mississippi.



Honorable Mentions

Excellence in Food Safety

The *Salmonella* Newport Illness Outbreak Traceback Investigation Team for work on the *Salmonella* Newport illness outbreak traceback investigation that resulted in a Class I Recall of over 6 million pounds of product. Team leader: Deputy Regional Director Jannette Pagan, Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit (OIEA). Team members: Investigator Stephanie Calkins, OIEA; Veterinary Epidemiologist Andrea Cote, Office of Public Health Science (OPHS); Investigator Michael Dunn, OIEA; Deputy Director Bonnie Kissler, OPHS; Investigator Ana Marin, OIEA; Supervisory Investigator Adriana Perez, OIEA; and Investigator Stacy Tyralla, OIEA.

Excellence in Modernization and Innovation

Electronic Consumer Complaint Form Development Team for enhancing end-to-end customer service in consumer complaints. Team leader: Epidemiologist Kristal Southern, Office of Public Health Science (OPHS). Team members: Epidemiologist Jennifer Freiman, OPHS; Public Health Officer Kysha Hendricks, OPHS; District Case Specialist Francheska McClendon, Office of Field Operations; and Surveillance Epidemiologist Doug Noveroske, OPHS.

Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion

The Office of Program and Policy Development's (OPPD) Equal Employment Office Advisory Committee for championing diversity and inclusion within OPPD and FSIS by sponsoring innovative events throughout the year, such as the Aging Workforce Conference. Team leaders: Food Technologist Melinda Mallon and Economist Bryan Maculloch. Team members: Food Technologist Tammie Ballard, Senior Staff Officer Carrie Clark, Supervisory Economist Andrew Pugliese, Program Management Officer Shercoda Smaw, Veterinary Staff Officer Erika StappKamotani, Staff Officer Tawana Harrington, Director Rosalyn Murphy-Jenkins and Senior Microbiologist Susan Hammons.

Excellence in Customer Service

The AskUSDA Contact Center for exceptional service in implementing the Secretary's pilot AskUSDA contact center, providing thousands of Americans with answers to their questions about food and agriculture. Project team leaders: Deputy Assistant Administrator Aaron Lavalley, OPACE, and Director Chris Bernstein, OPACE. Team members: Technical Information Specialists Maribel Alonso, Keyana Francis and Clara Yuvienco, OPACE; and Program Assistant Lynn Williams, OFO.

Employee of the Year (In-Plant)

Brian Riehle for consistent and exceptional performance of consumer safety inspector (CSI) duties and professional interactions with plant management, supervisors and colleagues. Riehle is a CSI in the Office of Field Operations at Est. 20852 in LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

Leader of the Year (In-Plant)

David Vasquez for outstanding leadership in developing a diverse team of well-trained inspection personnel who worked collaboratively to ensure safety of regulated product. Vasquez is a supervisory consumer safety inspector in the Office of Field Operations at Est. M-00675 in Hereford, Texas.

Leader of the Year (In-Plant)

Anne DelVecchio for exemplary work in monitoring foreign animal diseases and residues in cull sows and boars. DelVecchio is a supervisory public health veterinarian in the Office of Field Operations Des Moines District.

Leader of the Year (Non-In-Plant)

Dawn Sprouls for exceptional and effective management of two FSIS district offices. Sprouls is district manager of the Office of Field Operations Des Moines District.

AROUND THE AGENCY

The AskUSDA Contact Center will serve as the "one front door" for phone, chat, and web inquiries, transforming how the public interacts with the Department. AskUSDA also offers over five thousand articles on <https://ask.usda.gov>, providing a self-service option to address the most common issues and questions.

Internally, AskUSDA will provide actionable insights to Mission Areas and Agencies, helping them to improve customer experience across the Department.



Learn more by watching this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FA-8J1YpsIU&feature=youtu.be>.

National American Indian Heritage Month

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

“Many of the foods we eat and the medicines and remedies we use were introduced by Indians, and more than one highway follows an Indian trail. Indians make contributions in every area of endeavor and American life, and our literature and all our arts draw upon Indian themes and wisdom. Countless American Indians have served in our Armed Forces and have fought valiantly for our country.” These words appeared in Presidential Proclamation 5577 when President Ronald Reagan proclaimed November 23-30, 1986, the first “American Indian Week.”

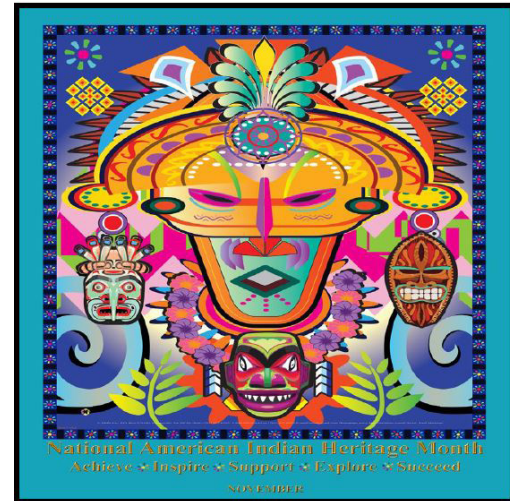
In 1990, the first “National American Indian Heritage Month” was authorized by Congress and proclaimed by President George H.W. Bush. Since then, additional proclamations have urged citizens to learn more about American Indian cultures and celebrate their contributions.

American Indian culture affects many areas of American life: our history, food, music, entertainment, literature and sports. Lacrosse, one of the oldest team sports in North America, began as a stickball game American Indians played long before English colonization began.

November is a great time to celebrate the rich cultures and contributions of Native Americans by visiting the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). NMAI “cares for one

of the world’s most expansive collections of Native artifacts, including objects, photographs, archives and media.” Visit one of NMAI’s three facilities: the museum on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the George Gustav Heye Center in New York City,

or the Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Maryland. You can also participate in NMAI’s off-site outreach efforts, which include traveling exhibitions, community programs and websites. Learn more and find out about current closures at <https://americanindian.si.edu/>.



Veterans Day: Honoring All Who Served

By Felicia Thompson, OPACE

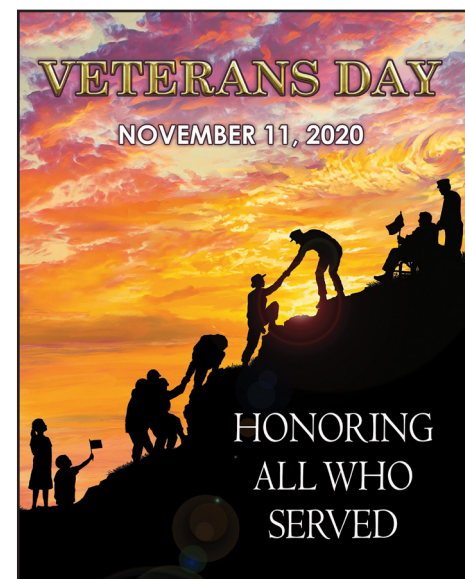
Phone: (202) 603-2150

When thinking of the United States Armed Forces, seven values come to mind — Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage. The men and women who serve — yesterday and today — continue to live by these values while in uniform and when they eventually return to civilian life.

Veterans from every branch of America’s uniformed services — Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy, the U.S. Public Health Service and the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps — have made tremendous sacrifices for our nation, from being away from their families for long periods to risking their lives in war-torn countries to facing challenges (e.g., obtaining reliable employment, dealing with mental health issues and homelessness) when their military career ends.

Our country values its current service members and honors our veterans every year on Nov. 11, which marks the anniversary of the end of World War I at the 11th hour of the

11th day of the 11th month of 1918. America remembers those who served and have given of themselves to protect our nation’s shores. If you know a service member or someone who served, thank them for their service.



SNAPSHOTS FROM

Faribault, Minn.

On Oct. 6, the FSIS inspection team at P-579, a turkey slaughter and processing establishment, gathered with Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, second from right) for a quick photo.



Pictured, front row: Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian (SPHV) Dr. Kelsey Huus, Food Inspector Michael Khawgei, Kiecker and SPHV Dr. Michael Thompson. Pictured, second row, from left: Consumer Safety Inspectors Gregory Rangel and Michael Wallace. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.



Glencoe, Minn.

On Oct. 5, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left) visited inspection personnel and toured Establishment M-2522, a hog slaughter and processing plant. Pictured, from left: Kiecker, Consumer Safety Inspectors Renate Schaefer and William O'Malley and Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Paul Herberg. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.

Glencoe, Minn.

Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, center) was with retired Food Inspector Charlie Widmer (pictured, left) and Consumer Safety Inspector Ron Poepping (pictured, right) at Establishment M-40110, a hog slaughter and processing plant, for a tour on Oct. 5. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.



Gaylord, Minn.

On Oct. 5, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) met Egg Processing Inspector Jesus Pelayo at his establishment, G-1455. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.



Minneapolis, Minn.

On Oct. 5, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) met Consumer Safety Inspector Kristie Smith at Establishment M-45352, a meat processing plant. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.

THE FIELD



Burnsville, Minn.

On Oct. 5, Consumer Safety Inspectors Steven Mosley (pictured, left) and John Lally (pictured, right) welcomed Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, center) to Establishment M-4226 for a tour of the meat and poultry processing plant. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.



St. Paul, Minn.

Consumer Safety Inspectors San Son (pictured, center) and Matt Freechack (pictured, right) assigned to Establishment M-2488, a meat and poultry processing plant, met with Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left) on Oct. 6. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.



Minneapolis, Minn.

On Oct. 6, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left) met Frontline Supervisor Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick and Consumer safety Inspector Sonia Lara, both assigned to Establishment M-46264, a meat and poultry processing plant. Photo by Kristie Smith, OFO.



Newport, Minn.

Consumer Safety Inspectors Tina Duffe (pictured, left) and Elizabeth Hazen (pictured, right), assigned to Establishment M-15754A, a meat processing plant, met Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, center) when he visited the employees and toured the facility on Oct. 6. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.

Faribault, Minn.

Pictured, from left: Consumer Safety Inspector Brett Becker, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Kelsey Huus and Administrator Paul Kiecker stop for a photo after Kiecker's tour of M-18826A, a meat processing plant. Photo by Dr. Jaime Kirkpatrick, OFO.



Consider Donating to FSIS Leave Share Programs

By Susan Bowen, OM
Phone: (301) 851-4328

On Jan. 5, 2020, FSIS began its first-ever Leave Bank Program (LBP), which offers income protection and peace of mind to eligible FSIS employees who have exhausted their leave and are affected by an approved personal or family medical emergency. During this first year, FSIS had 335 contributing members, multiple donations from non-members and accumulated over 5,000 hours of donated leave. The hours donated helped 33 of your fellow FSIS employees with needs related to serious health conditions ranging from surgeries and cancer to childbirth and recovery.

The Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP) continues to run concurrently with the LBP. The VLTP allows employees to receive donated leave but limits the number of hours an individual employee can receive to the amount of leave donated to that individual by specific volunteers. The LBP provides an additional leave option for members. Members of the LBP do not need to wait for a volunteer to donate leave, because leave donated to the LBP is held in a pool to be distributed as recipient applications are approved.

The LBP open enrollment period for the 2021 leave year

runs Nov. 9 to Dec. 14, 2020. To participate, new and returning members must donate at least one pay period's worth of unused, accrued or restored annual leave during open enrollment.

At the end of each leave year, many employees have excess (use-or-lose) annual leave that they will not be able to schedule and use before it is forfeited. Individuals may donate leave to an approved VLTP or LBP recipient and/or the LBP anytime of the year.

Your contribution can go a long way in ensuring income protection for a fellow FSIS employee who is affected by a medical emergency. You can access a list of VLTP recipients and forms at <https://tinyurl.com/FSISLeaveShare>.

For more information on these leave share programs, contact the Office of Human Resources at 1-877-FSIS-HR1 (877-374-7471) or FSISHR1@usda.gov with the subject "Leave Share Programs."

Flu Vaccinations

COVID-19 has a lot of our attention right now, but it is important to remember that influenza (flu) is also contagious and dangerous. The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each year, in time for "flu season," when flu activity rises and peaks in fall and winter. It's not too late though! For more information, see <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/flushot.htm>; and to find a vaccine provider near you, visit <https://vaccinefinder.org/find-vaccine>.

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Extended

The Office of Personnel Management has extended the deadline for the FEVS paper-based survey from Nov. 20 to Nov. 27 for field employees. The web-based version closed Oct. 28.

Watch for the FEVS and take time to respond. Agency leadership looks forward to your feedback.

Show Some Love via CFC

With the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), choose from among more than 6,000 charities to make this upcoming Thanksgiving time and holiday season that much more special for people in need or for a cause important to you. Contribute or pledge to this year's campaign until Jan. 21, 2021. Contribute, volunteer or become a campaign worker via GiveCFC.org. You can also record contributions to a food bank or pantry through the Feds Feed Families Hub at <https://fedsfeedfamilies.ocio.usda.gov/pages/recording-and-results>.

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
Abdalla, Elazhari O., SVMO	Catonsville, Md.	16	Murphy, Franklin D., CSI	Hyrum, Utah	20
Adams, Cassandra A., FI-S	Morton, Miss.	26	Murray, Roy L., CSI	Caryville, Tenn.	31
Aycheh, Merid M., SVMO	Tuscaloosa, Ala.	17	Myers, Johnny L., CSI	North Kansas City, Mo.	35
Bailey, Sharon C., CSI	Accomac, Va.	35	Nehka, Gerald D., CSI	De Queen, Ark.	28
Bentley, David A., CSI	Springdale, Ark.	16	O'Connor, Leo T., SVMO	Croghan, N.Y.	13
Brown, Marcia L., FI-S	Dodge City, Kan.	15	Olivarez, Andy, CSI	San Angelo, Texas	38
Callens, Jeffrey G., CSI	Fremont, Calif.	29	Perkins, Linda S., FI-S	Morton, Miss.	10
Chestnutt, John R., FI-S	Lewiston, N.C.	38	Persing, Diana G., CSO	Springdale, Ark.	34
Clark, Jeffrey E., CSI	Moselle, Miss.	30	Pickart, Charles A., CSI	St Charles, Ill.	16
Conley, Peter W., CSI	North Haverhill, N.H.	13	Poe, Richard P., FI-S	Gadsden, Ala.	15
Cordova, Rafael, CSI	New York-Kings, N.Y.	33	Primeaux, Patsy A., CSI	Windsor, Wis.	20
Coronado Jr., Eduardo, CSI	Bryan, Texas	26	Queen, Shelley L., FI-S	De Queen, Ark.	15
Council, Nathan, CSI	Clinton, N.C.	33	Raggio, James E., FI-S	Waterloo, Iowa	21
Crawford, Ricky E., CSI	Ashland, Ala.	30	Rebuck, Vincent J., CSI	Marshall, Mo.	33
Cupp, Larry D., FI-S	Morristown, Tenn.	46	Revels, Glenda F., FI-S	Tar Heel, N.C.	11
Deibert, Donald M., CSI	Savannah, Ga.	27	Richardson, Stephanie, FI-S	Salisbury, Md.	31
Drake, Linda L., CSI	Batesville, Ark.	28	Rodas, David E., CSI	Canton, Mo.	18
Duke, Regina G., CSI	Batesville, Ark.	25	Santos, Daniel, FI-S	Cactus, Texas	13
Ezell, Deon R., FI-S	De Queen, Ark.	12	Schuknecht, Bruce A., FI-S	Storm Lake, Iowa	20
Gamal Eldin, Mohamed S., CSI	New York-Queens, N.Y.	12	Sharp, Gary W., CSI	Cudahy, Wis.	27
Garcia, Arthur F., FI-S	Amarillo, Texas	37	Shepard, Cynthia M., CSI	Dexter, Mo.	14
Greenawalt, Melanie R., CSI	Greeley, Colo.	18	Simmons, Cliff M., CSI	Tar Heel, N.C.	42
Harris, Barbara J., CSI	Cottondale, Fla.	23	Smart, Frances A., CSI	Batesville, Ark.	29
Haymond, Mary N., FI-S	Canton, Ga.	12	Smiling, William, CSI	Kinston, N.C.	35
Hooks, Rena M., FI-S	De Queen, Ark.	17	Solieman, Hamdy R., SVMO	Hagerstown, Md.	19
Jaramillo, Leonard J., FI-S	Friona, Texas	40	Tanner, Adoncie, CSI	Dardanelle, Ark.	25
Johnson, Linda M., FI-S	Springdale, Ark.	19	Todd, Lillie J., FI-S	Lewiston, N.C.	27
Johnston, Bonnie J., CSI	St Henry, Ohio	14	Trautman, Danny R., CSI	California, Mo.	35
Jones Jr., Earl W., Prog. Analy.	Albany, Calif.	10	Vaughan, Carolyn M., FI-S	Lewiston, N.C.	15
Kaup, Robert L., FI-S	Madison, Neb.	22	Warren, Jacqueline Y., FI-S	De Queen, Ark.	21
Kephart, Rosalind R., CSI	Teachey, N.C.	30	Watkins, Rickie D., CSI	Holland, Mich.	42
Lane Jr., Willie C., CSI	Camilla, Ga.	39	Whitfield, Kathryn W., Bio. Sci. Lab. Tech.	Athens, Ga.	35
Lewis, Sharon D., FI-S	Farmerville, La.	14	Wilson, Mark A., CSI	Dexter, Mo.	24
Lough, Wade H., CSI	Moorefield, W.Va.	33	Wolfe, Beverly J., FI-S	Springdale, Ark.	25
May, Mary C., CSO	Albany, Calif.	8	Wong, Warren C., Supv. Microbiologist	Albany, Calif.	33
McAnally, Kathleen N., SVMO	Chattanooga, Tenn.	35			
McGhee, Wilma F., CSI	Forest, Miss.	13			
Miller-Howard, Jayme A., FI-S	Ottumwa, Iowa	22			

POLICY UPDATES

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

- Notice 50-20, Fiscal Year 2021 – Continuing Education Program for Public Health Veterinarians
- Notice 51-20, Eligibility Criteria and Procedures for Ordering FSIS Business Cards and Format of the Business Cards
- Notice 52-20, Updated – Training Requirements for International Travel
- Notice 53-20, Special Provisions for Pay Period 25
- Notice 54-20, Change in Travel Management Center
- Notice 55-20, Leave Bank Program 2020 Open Enrollment Period
- Notice 56-20, Imported Raw Poultry Products Sampled for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* Analysis
- Notice 57-20, 2020 USDA Travel Charge Card Training
- Notice 58-20, Federal Holidays in Calendar Year 2021
- Notice 59-20, Federal Benefits 2020 Open Season
- Directive 1232.4 – Rev. 1, Regulations Development and Clearance
- Directive 7120.1 – Rev. 54, Safe and Suitable Ingredients Used in the Production of Meat, Poultry and Egg Products

Recent and Upcoming FSIS Meetings

Employee Town Hall Meetings

Employees only.

Dec. 16 (Call-in numbers below. Times are Eastern Time.)

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

Access codes:

9 a.m., 6827798

3 p.m., 8114301

9 p.m., 8009258

Jan. 27 (Call-in information not yet available. Times will be the same.)

Submit questions to FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

Recent Meetings

***Salmonella* - State of the Science (Virtual Public Meeting)**

Sept. 22, 2020

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

National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection

Sept. 24-25, 2020

Presentations and information are available through the FSIS website at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/meetings>.

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

Oct. 6, 2020

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

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Town Hall Round-Up

The Agency is also assuming regulatory authority of egg substitutes and freeze-dried egg products, which pose the same risk as egg products and will be inspected in the same manner. Consistent with meat and poultry processing inspection regulations, FSIS inspectors will visit egg product plants at least once per production shift. "We will be working closely with FSIS employees as establishments transition to the new system and egg inspector positions are converted to consumer safety inspector positions," said Kiecker. FSIS will place egg products inspection program personnel on patrol assignments after all new regulatory requirements are met. FSIS is allowing domestic establishments and eligible foreign countries one year to implement their SSOP procedures and two years to implement HACCP procedures. All other regulatory requirements will take effect 60 days after

publication of the final rule in the Federal Register. See cover of the October 2020 *Beacon* for more information.

New Performance Management System. The new USDA performance management and awards programs took effect Oct. 1. (See the August and October *Beacon* issues and FSIS user notice sent Oct. 26.) Fiscal Year 2021 performance plans are due Nov. 30. The new system is a two-tier rating system: Fully Successful or Unacceptable. Awards are now based on accomplishments instead of the end-of-year ratings. "Please review the details of the new performance and awards system and bring any questions to your supervisor," said Kiecker. "It is important to understand the new system as you work with your supervisor to develop your

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performance plan for this fiscal year.”

Questions from FSISFeedback@usda.gov

Question: “How is the Agency dealing with disruptions to inspection assignment rotations related to COVID-19?”

Response from the Administrator: Agency leadership has empowered each district to make decisions on rotations that fit their unique situations. Each district is continuing to look at the feasibility of rotations, taking into account the local public health conditions and any mitigations that may impact decision making, such as face coverings and face shields. We recognize that rotations have the ability to affect things like hours and access to overtime, and we understand that employees’ views on rotations will vary based on their circumstances. We are striving to minimize movement of employees as much as possible, while still meeting our mission. We encourage you to speak with your supervisor if you have any concerns.”

Question: “How will the Agency acknowledge FSIS employees lost to and during COVID-19?”

Response from the Administrator: “On Oct. 8, 2020, we honored all employees who passed away this year by observing a moment of silence during the annual Administrator’s Awards for Excellence & Under Secretary’s Awards ceremony, as we have in prior years. For privacy reasons, we do not disclose causes of death. Additionally, I send a condolences letter to a family member every time one of our employees passes away.”

Question: A number of in-plant employees have asked how to address the issue of face shields fogging up.

Response from Phil Bronstein, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Field Operations: “We recognize that some employees might have some challenges with wearing face shields and can find it difficult performing their jobs. Fogging can occur with face shields as they are worn close to the face. Fogging is also expected when undergoing rapid temperature changes. The inner surface of the shield may be treated with an anti-fog wipe or spray if necessary. FSIS Notice 31-20 includes information for ordering anti-fog supplies available from the USDA supply center. The Agency is researching different types of face shields that should be available for employees soon. Please contact the supply center to order shields and see which works best for you.”

Reminders

Expectations for Using Protective Equipment. The FSISFeedback@usda.gov email box continues to receive questions about protective equipment. The Agency requires in-plant personnel to wear face coverings and face shields. The Administrator said, “We will continue to require this protective equipment until public

health experts deem that it is safe to operate without it.” The Agency expects supervisors to ensure that in-plant personnel are wearing the required equipment appropriately and to enforce the policy.

Benefits through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) provision entitlements end Dec. 31, 2020. See the May 2020 *Beacon* article on page 2.

eDevices. The eDevices provide immediate access to Agency guidance, trainings and USDA emails, and the ability to submit timesheets via WebTA. Employees will be able to use eDevices on a recurring basis during their normal tour of duty. Beginning Jan. 1, FSIS will no longer print materials for distribution because employees will have electronic access. This includes notices and directives, training documents and *The Beacon*.

Payroll Tax Deferral. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the President deferred social security payroll tax withholdings for eligible Federal employees from mid-September to Dec. 31, 2020. Note that the taxes deferred must be paid back. Employees with tax deferrals will have their take home pay reduced during 2021 until all deferred taxes have been paid. This will automatically come out of your pay from Jan. 1 to April 30, 2021. Frequently asked questions are available at www.fsis.usda.gov/employees under FSIS Employee News as “Payroll Tax Withholding Deferral for USDA Employees.”

Training for Travel Charge Cards. All FSIS employees with travel charge cards are required to complete the AgLearn course, USDA Travel Charge Card Training. Cardholders that have computer access as of Oct. 31, 2020, are to complete the training no later than Dec. 31, 2020. Cardholders that do not have computer access as of Oct. 31, 2020, are to complete the training no later than March 31, 2021.

FSIS Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Annual Plan. The FY21 Annual Plan is being finalized and will be the last annual plan developed under the Fiscal Year 2017-2021 Strategic Plan. “I want to emphasize that modernization is a key component of our current five-year strategic plan,” said the Administrator. This year’s annual plan builds on four years of accomplishments aimed at modernizing food safety, strengthening data-driven decision making, and improving retention and training opportunities for FSIS employees. “I’d encourage you to review the Annual Plan as you are developing your goals and performance plans for the next Fiscal Year,” said Kiecker.

Rochelle Kopicki Keeps Consumers Safe Through Recalls

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

FSIS' mission is to protect public health by ensuring the safety of meat, poultry and egg products. What happens when adulterated product is shipped into commerce? Rochelle Kopicki, a consumer safety officer in the Office of Field Operations' (OFO) Recall Management and Technical Analysis Division (RMTAD), takes steps to recall the products to help ensure consumer safety. An FSIS employee for nine years, Kopicki analyzes potential recalls and coordinates with other FSIS program areas to determine whether the affected product is a risk to public health and available to consumers, and whether FSIS has the legal support for a recall action.

Her Role in Recalls

Kopicki and the RMTAD team learn of potential recalls from different resources, but most often they are informed by district offices that oversee federal plants and report issues identified by inspection personnel, or by the plant when product has already been shipped. Once RMTAD receives initial information, Kopicki evaluates the potential recall situation, ensures all relevant details are provided and verified, and requests additional information as needed to further assess the situation, such as records for heating and cooling deviations or when there are labels with undeclared allergens.

She then contacts the Office of Public Health Science (OPHS) and the Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD) experts for assessments. Next, she convenes a conference call for the recall committee that includes several FSIS program areas and OFO's district office. During the call, Kopicki provides background information on the potential recall, the team discusses the health risks and policy assessments, then every program area on the committee votes whether to recommend a recall.

If the committee votes yes, Kopicki contacts the recalling firm and asks if they are willing to voluntarily recall the product. If they agree, she compiles a recall case and provides support to district offices who conduct effectiveness checks in commerce to verify that recalled product is controlled, such as providing guidance on how to select locations for recall effectiveness checks and determine check eligibility. When the recalling firm completes the product recall and FSIS verification activities have concluded, Kopicki reviews the firm's efforts to recover product and prepares closure documents.

Participation in Agency Modernization Efforts

Not all of Kopicki's workdays involve a recall. This year, she has served as a team lead for one of the Agency's latest modernization



Rochelle Kopicki, consumer safety officer in OFO's Recall Management and Technical Analysis Division (RMTAD). Photo by Neil Kopicki, her husband.

2021. I am really looking forward to seeing it implemented and the difference it makes in streamlining the Agency's process for receiving and managing reports of product adulteration and misbranding."

Kopicki's Career Path

An active member of Future Farmers of America in high school, Kopicki always knew she wanted a career in agriculture or animal health and pursued an animal science (pre-veterinary) degree at California State Polytechnic University (Cal Poly) Pomona. A team of enforcement, investigations and analysis officer (EIAO) recruiters visited her meat science class to discuss internship opportunities. Said Kopicki, "I had decided that vet school wasn't something I wanted to pursue and was considering other options when I learned about FSIS. Meat science happened to be my favorite college course and I loved learning about and enforcing regulations, so I decided that an EIAO internship might be a good fit for me."

She interned with FSIS in summer 2011 and during her last year at Cal Poly. Upon graduation, she applied for an EIAO position where she was later mentored by Lisa Wang, district case specialist in the Alameda District. Wang's influence was instrumental in Kopicki's decision to apply for a detail position with RMTAD in 2018. After the three-month detail, a full-time position opened in RMTAD and Kopicki was brought on board in May 2018.

efforts, the Adulterated Product Monitoring (APM) module of the Public Health Information System. Kopicki helped ensure the system is designed to capture relevant information for events involving adulterated or misbranded products in commerce and is operating effectively. Kopicki also led several user training sessions and assisted with the design of APM help tutorials. Said Kopicki, "Much time and effort have gone into the system development, which was deployed at the end of September to use at the beginning of fiscal year

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2021 Continuing Education Program for Inspectors

By Stephanie Wilkins, OEED

Phone: (202) 205-2954

Food inspectors and consumer safety inspectors interested in enrolling in job-related undergraduate and graduate college courses may qualify for tuition reimbursement through the Continuing Education Program (CEP). All applicants must be permanent, full-time employees in good standing and with a minimum of 1 year of service with FSIS.

There are three enrollment periods each year. Inspectors must apply each semester to be reimbursed for courses that begin within that semester period. The 2021 spring, summer and fall semester registration dates are as follows: Registration for the Spring 2021 semester is underway and the deadline to submit applications is Nov. 30, 2020. The enrollment periods for the summer and fall 2021 semesters are March 22-April 30, 2021, and June 21-July 26, 2021, respectively.

To apply, submit your application during open enrollment. The CEP application may be downloaded from “IPP Help Resources” at fsishelp.fsis.usda.gov/ipphelp/cep/cep.htm. For questions or application requests, email the Office of Employee Experience and Development (OEED) at ContinuingEducationProgram@usda.gov or call (301) 344-0734.

The CEP is not a degree program; however, it can support your degree and career development goals. Participants pay course tuition costs up front and are reimbursed a maximum of \$3,000 per year. Courses must be related to food safety, food science, animal science or meat science and be taken from a nationally accredited college or university. To qualify for reimbursement, courses must be CEP-approved, passed with a grade C or better, and taken on personal time.

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Kopicki finds fulfilment in her role through opportunities to apply critical thinking skills. Said Kopicki, “I always ask myself ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ Why is an issue important to public health and how can we apply Agency policy to address it?”

Paying it Forward

During her time as an EIAO in the Alameda District Office, Kopicki volunteered as a recruiter and visited local colleges and student events to spread awareness about food safety and career opportunities with FSIS. She even visited the same meat science class she took with the same professor at Cal Poly. Said Kopicki, “I consider myself an advocate for FSIS internship opportunities because I learned about FSIS through a recruitment event and started my career as an intern. It was my way of paying it forward in hopes that other students will consider a career in food safety.” She has also volunteered to conduct outreach activities at federal establishments to discuss the FSIS recall process and new Agency developments.

Married to her high school sweetheart, Neil, she dreams of having a large gourmet kitchen for making meals for her family. In addition to cooking, Kopicki enjoys camping, hiking, indoor cycling, traveling with Neil, spending time with family and playing with her dogs, Pluto and Vega.

She also enjoys sharing food safety messages; she said, “My friends and family are very receptive when I talk to them about being food safe. I talk a lot about how to read labels, safe internal temperatures and handling practices when cooling or reheating food.”

Faces of Food Safety



Rochelle Kopicki with husband, Neil, in Kirkjufell, Iceland.



RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

October 9	FSIS issued a public health alert for ready-to-eat meat and poultry bowl products due to concerns that the products may be contaminated with extraneous material, specifically glass.
October 17	Taher, Inc., a Plymouth, Minn., firm, is recalling approximately 22,096 pounds of meat products that were produced without the benefit of federal inspection.
For more information, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls .	

Emergency Backup Dependent Care Program

The Emergency Backup Dependent Care (EBDC) program is available to FSIS employees and their dependents. The EBDC program helps find and pay for backup care when regular child or adult care arrangements are disrupted, even at the last minute. Coverage is provided for dependent children or adults for whom employees are responsible. It also includes employee self-care due to illness or recovery from surgery. The program provides up to 20 visits per employee dependent, per fiscal year. Call the Federal Occupational Health national call center at (800) 222-0364 or log in to www.worklife4you.com (new user registration code: FSIS) to request assistance. Find more information at www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/informational/aboutfsis/audience-employees/dependentcare or contact the FSIS EAP & WorkLife Program at eap@usda.gov.

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- FSISHR1@usda.gov

YOUR HR SOLUTION CENTER

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 2021 issue by Feb. 1. Email submissions to FSISConnections@usda.gov. Photos should be high-resolution in .jpg format. If you have questions or need the consent form, contact Laura Reiser at Laura.Reiser@usda.gov or (202) 720-7894, or Felicia Thompson at Felicia.Thompson@usda.gov or (202) 603-2150.

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