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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

October 2020



Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Consumer Safety Inspector Clayton Tanner and Food Inspector Candice Gillette represented FSIS at the 95th Annual Box Elder County Fair in Tremonton, Utah, on Aug. 22-29. This year's theme, "Where Generations Share the Magic," embraced the traditions of families attending community fairs.

While at the fair, Tanner and Gillette followed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidance and wore facial coverings and adhered to social distancing protocols when they spoke with hundreds of visitors about their careers, answered food safety questions, and provided information about safe cooking temperatures, pathogens, preventing cross-contamination, and how to use a food thermometer. Photo courtesy of Clayton Tanner, OFO.

FSIS Modernizes Eggs Products Inspection for First Time Since 1970

By Buckley McKay, OPACE
Phone: (202) 720-0284

On Sept. 9, FSIS announced a regulatory change that modernizes egg products inspection to foster innovation in the industry and align egg products regulations with the meat and poultry products regulations. This is the first time since Congress passed the Egg Products Inspection Act (EPIA) in 1970 that FSIS has modernized its egg products inspection methods.

Since the late 1990s, meat and poultry establishments have had to develop Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), and to meet other sanitation requirements. Under HACCP, plants can tailor a food safety system that best fits their particular facility and equipment, with the flexibility and the incentive to innovate to achieve enhanced food safety, such as additional food safety or process controls.

Under the previous egg product inspection system, establishments had to comply with prescriptive command-and-control requirements that created unnecessary regulatory burdens on the industry and required FSIS inspection program personnel (IPP) to carry out more inspection tasks than needed. As a result, IPP were less able to focus attention on areas of greatest risk. The new rule fixes this problem. It also provides for the presence of inspectors at FSIS-regulated plants at the same frequency that meat and poultry processing establishments are provided inspectors: at least once per shift, rather than during all processing operations.

Plants that produce egg products are required under the modernization to develop and implement HACCP systems and Sanitation SOPs. The final rule eliminates the prescriptive command-and-control

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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.

Dec. issue – due Nov. 1 Jan. issue – due Dec. 1
Feb. issue – due Jan. 1 Mar. issue – due Feb. 1

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

The FSIS Management Council

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SPOTLIGHT

Robert Bane: OIEA's New Assistant Administrator

By Felicia Thompson, OPACE

Phone: (202) 205-9850

"Open and professional communication drives an organization's continuous improvement," said Robert Bane, the new assistant administrator for the Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit (OIEA). "If the team is encouraged to be involved, their voices heard and opinions valued, they will share their concerns and contribute solutions and ideas," said Bane of one of his leadership philosophies. Bane will lead a team of approximately 215 investigators, auditors and other professionals across the country by being an effective communicator, upfront and accessible, and by providing timely and accurate information to aid him and his team in making the best decisions possible.

Surpassing Expectations

Assistant Administrator Bane and his team are responsible for a wide range of Agency functions that include surveillance and investigative activities for foodborne illness outbreaks, natural disasters and intentional contamination; state and foreign audit programs; and enforcement and litigation functions. He said of his new role, "I'm up to the challenge. I hope to leverage the knowledge and expertise within this already high-functioning group to identify opportunities for the Agency to become even more effective at protecting public health."

Carl Mayes, the assistant chief information officer for FSIS' Office of the Chief Information Officer, was Bane's predecessor in OIEA. Bane credits Mayes for making the transition to OIEA's assistant administrator a smooth one. He said, "Carl built an exceptional team. I will use the foundation that he left and enhance OIEA's partnerships with other FSIS program areas and advance the development and implementation of tools and processes that will have a positive impact on public health. One area of focus will be increasing our effectiveness in pinpointing the source of illness outbreaks and decreasing the time it takes to do that. I also want OIEA to be recognized as a highly desirable organization to be part of, with a positive, team-oriented working environment."

Mayes said, "Robert is an exceptional professional who understands what it takes to accomplish the mission and to take care of his people. With his decades of leadership experience, he understands the nuances of the job and will be invaluable in leading OIEA into the future. Anyone who has worked with Robert is aware that he will meet this self-imposed challenge and surpass all expectations."

From Field to Headquarters

Bane began his 23-year-career with FSIS in the Office of Field Operations (OFO) as a food inspector in Lufkin, Texas. This entry-level position was his introduction to the FSIS ideal, "One Team, One Purpose," that empowers employees in understanding their individual impact on the Agency's mission. "Knowing how you contribute to the mission is very powerful. Employees are more dedicated when they feel their life's work

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Under Secretary's Column

As the Undersecretary of Food Safety, an academic and most importantly a mother, I care deeply about food safety and pathogen control. One pathogen in particular, *Salmonella*, is a leading cause of foodborne illness. Outbreaks of *Salmonella* illness



Dr. Mindy Brashears

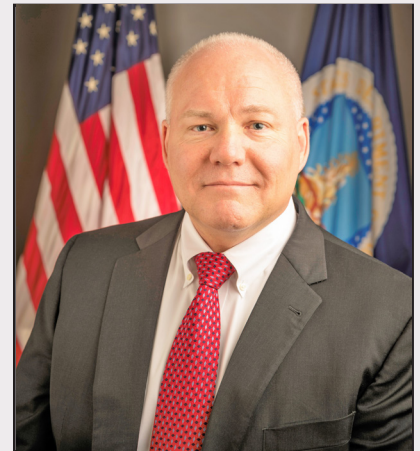
have been linked to poultry, pork and beef products, and as such, FSIS has a strong focus on reducing its prevalence and preventing foodborne illness.

Since coming to USDA, I've had the opportunity to learn how FSIS is taking on the challenge of *Salmonella*, and I wanted to capture Agency efforts in one place. I asked a team of microbiologists, epidemiologists, scientists and policy makers from across the Agency to develop a roadmap for how FSIS aggressively targets *Salmonella*. We recently released this document, [Roadmap to Reducing Salmonella: Driving Change through Science-Based Policy](#), at a virtual public meeting on Sept. 22. The meeting attracted approximately 850 attendees and 38 comments were received through [regulations.gov](#). A recording of the event will be posted at the FSIS Meetings page at www.fsis.usda.gov/meetings.

The Roadmap showcases our holistic approach to *Salmonella* control and innovation. It clarifies the Agency's activities that contribute to pathogen reduction. As food safety challenges evolve, FSIS will continue to use science and data to modernize inspection systems, laboratory and sampling methods, and communications to meet consumer needs and protect public health. We want to ensure that consumers are empowered with information on how to safely handle, cook and store food. The Roadmap provides transparency and a call to action to all of our stakeholders for participation in our *Salmonella* control strategy. I encourage you to review the Roadmap and consider how we can all come together to "Do Right and Feed Everyone, safely."

Administrator's Column

During my 33 years with the Agency, I have held many jobs between food inspector and Administrator. Each position brought new responsibilities and an increasing need to make more and more decisions. As a senior leader at FSIS, I am actively engaged in some aspect of decision-making



Paul Kiecker

at nearly every moment of my day. Whether I'm reviewing information, developing ideas or evaluating alternatives to current approaches, all of these play a role in my decision-making.

One of the most important lessons I've learned about decision-making is to carefully consider how each decision impacts others. This often requires thinking broadly about the needs and interests of our key stakeholders: FSIS employees; consumers who eat the meat, poultry and egg products we regulate; and the industry we regulate. There can also be great diversity within these groups. For example, inspectors on patrol assignments likely have different needs and concerns than those assigned to a large slaughter plant.

Regardless of your position within the Agency, your decisions also affect others. A food inspector will make decisions that not only impact their assigned establishment, but perhaps in a ripple effect, impacting the circuit and even the district. Those involved in import and export verification make decisions that have impacts around the world. A supervisor may make a decision regarding a single employee; this may have an impact on other employees. A district manager's decision about one establishment has the potential to affect other plants in that circuit and district, or potentially across the country. At the headquarters level, decisions can impact one or more FSIS offices, other USDA or government agencies, or even other countries.

Every FSIS employee makes decisions each day, and we must all be considering the impact that our choices and our actions have on others. And each decision has an impact. These considerations are part of our responsibility as public servants, and supportable decisions are what makes FSIS a successful, effective organization.

FY 2021 Awards Under the New Employee Performance and Awards Program

By Dwaynya Goodson, OM

Phone: (202) 720-4626

Effective Oct. 1, 2020, USDA launched a new two-tier performance management system and awards program. Under the new program, awards are solely accomplishment-based with a focus on contributions to FSIS' mission throughout the year, not end-of-year employee ratings.

Employees may receive recognition in four categories: Achievement (Extra Effort and Time-Off) Award; Non-Monetary Award; Quality Step Increase (QSI); and Recognition Coin Initiative.

Achievement (Extra Effort and Time-Off) Award. Employees are eligible for monetary and time-off "Achievement Awards" to recognize specific accomplishments that exceed normal job requirements. To be eligible, the employee must have a rating of record at that time of Fully Successful. Time-Off Award (TOA) hours no longer expire; up to 80 hours can be carried over from one calendar year to the next. Agencies may also honor up to 40 hours of existing TOAs for employees transferring to FSIS from other USDA agencies or federal agencies.

Non-Monetary Award. Employees are eligible for non-monetary awards valued at \$35 or below for noteworthy accomplishments.

Quality Step Increase (QSI). Employees performing at a level that is significantly above expectations defined at the Fully Successful level of their performance plan will be eligible to be considered for a QSI. Employees must also be at the full performance level of their position and been performing the same type of work for at least 18 months. An employee is eligible to receive a QSI as frequently as every two years.

Recognition Coin Initiative. A supervisor may recognize an employee on the spot when his/her contributions or behavior exemplifies one or more of the criteria aligned with the core values set forth in the FSIS Strategic Plan.

Detailed information on the changes to the awards program policy can be found in the revised Departmental Regulation 4040-430, Employee Performance and Awards. If you have any questions regarding the new awards program, please email FSISHR1@usda.gov.

Ratings-Based Awards for FY 2020 Still Coming this Fall

By Leo O'Drudy, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-8693

As seen in the August 2020 *Beacon* (page 1), USDA has moved to a new performance system with an updated awards program based solely on accomplishments. This includes a change from the awards system used for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 that included awards for accomplishments **and** end-of-year performance ratings. These changes took effect for FY 2021, which began on October 1, 2020.

It's important to note that employees can still receive awards this fall based on their FY 2020 end-of-year performance ratings of Superior or Outstanding. The former performance-rating-based award system still applies for the rating cycle that ended on September 30, 2020. The former system will officially end when the FY 2020 awards are processed and awarded during the last part of this calendar year.

The new accomplishment-based awards system is now underway and is in effect for work being done as of October 1.

This fall, not only can employees receive awards for their FY 2020 performance ratings, they can also begin to receive achievement-based awards for their FY 2021 accomplishments. See companion piece above on FY 2021 Awards for more details. If you have any questions, please email FSISHR1@usda.gov.

Thanksgiving 2020: A Celebration to Remember

By Yolande Mitchell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-5554

Thanksgiving 2020 will be one to remember! Friends and families may celebrate the holiday differently than in the past. Families may not have the opportunity to gather around the dinner table. Instead, families can try something fun and innovative. Gathering virtually to share a recipe or cook their meals can keep family connected and traditions alive.

For families with children, assign fun tasks for prepping the meal to help everyone feel included and busy. Try a family cook-off by making the same dishes. Show your progress by sharing photos or video chat while you are cooking in the kitchen. However you decide to cook your meal, FSIS wants you to be safe and recommends these food safety tips before, during and after your meal is prepared, and for storing leftover foods.

If you plan to cook a turkey for your special meal, there is a decision to make when selecting your bird: fresh or frozen. When choosing a frozen turkey, FSIS recommends three options for thawing your turkey:

- In a container in the refrigerator, allowing 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds of weight.
- In a leak-proof plastic bag in a sink of cold water, changing the water every 30 minutes.
- In the microwave, following the microwave manufacturer's instructions.

Never thaw your turkey by leaving it out on the counter. A turkey must defrost at a safe temperature to prevent foodborne illness. When the turkey is left out at room temperature for more than two hours, it becomes unsafe to consume. Bacteria can grow rapidly in the "danger zone" between 40 °F and 140 °F. Raw poultry can contaminate anything it touches with harmful bacteria. Follow these four steps to food safety to prevent the spread of harmful bacteria to your other food and to protect family and friends.

Clean: Clean hands, surfaces and utensils with soap and water before cooking. Wash hands with clean, running water (warm or cold) and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling raw meat and poultry. After cleaning surfaces that raw meat and poultry have touched, use a bleach-based solution to sanitize.

Separate: Use separate cutting boards, plates and utensils to avoid cross-contamination between raw meat and poultry, plus other foods that are ready to eat.

Cook: Always use a food thermometer to ensure foods are cooked to a safe minimal internal temperature.

Chill: Chill foods promptly if not consuming immediately after cooking. Do not leave food at room temperature for more than two hours.

After the meal is done and the cleanup process has begun, take the following steps to avoid foodborne illness: refrigerate the leftovers at 40 °F or colder as soon as possible or within two hours of preparation, and slice or divide big cuts of meat, such as a roast turkey, into small quantities for refrigeration so they will cool quickly. Reheat your leftovers to at least 165 °F using your food thermometer to check the temperature before serving.

If your family plans to enjoy the Thanksgiving meal outside the home, FSIS recommends that families follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines when planning large events and gatherings to stay safe by social distancing while enjoying your meal. Visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html to learn more.

To learn more about Thanksgiving food safety, visit [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov), follow FSIS on Twitter, [@USDAFoodSafety](https://twitter.com/USDAFoodSafety), or on Facebook at [Facebook.com/FoodSafety.gov](https://www.facebook.com/FoodSafety.gov). For other food safety-related questions, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm Eastern Time (ET), Monday through Friday, or send an email to mpholine@usda.gov or chat live at <https://ask.usda.gov/>. On Thanksgiving Day, the hotline will be open from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. ET.



Find the Host Thanksgiving Like a Pro Infographic on the FSIS Flickr page at www.flickr.com/photos/usdafoodsafety/30614976187/in/album-72157671912703496/.

Restoration of Annual Leave Forfeited Due to the Pandemic

By Susan Bowen, OM

Phone: (301) 851-4328

On Aug. 10, 2020, the Office of Personnel Management issued an interim rule (www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/08/10/2020-16823/scheduling-of-annual-leave-by-employees-determined-necessary-to-respond-to-certain-national) regarding Federal agencies restoring forfeited annual leave for employees who were required to perform mission-critical work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interim rule covers COVID-19 as well as other national emergencies as declared by the President in the future.

Typically, when an employee has their annual leave scheduled and approved by the third pay period prior to the end of the leave year and the Agency cancels the employee's leave due to an exigency of the public business or leave is forfeited for other qualifying reasons, the supervisor can request restoration of the employee's forfeited annual leave if the employee is unable to reschedule their use-or-lose leave. Under the interim rule, the

deadline for scheduling and approving use-or-lose annual leave has been waived for employees required to work during the pandemic and unable to schedule their use-or-lose leave or had their leave canceled by the Agency. This rule does not apply to employees who chose to cancel their use-or-lose annual leave for their own purposes.

To streamline the process, supervisors must provide a list of employees who were unable to schedule their leave or whose leave was canceled by the Agency to conduct mission-critical duties during the pandemic and include the number of forfeited leave hours for each employee. Supervisors should email this information to the FSIS Office of Human Resources at payandleaveguidance@usda.gov no later than January 30, 2021. Questions regarding the interim rule can be sent to the same email address.

...Continued from page 1

requirements. This is in line with FSIS' Strategic Plan Goal 2 to modernize scientific techniques and inspection procedures.

The change will allow for improved use of FSIS inspection program resources and cost savings resulting from the flexibility of allowing egg products plants to decide how they wish to produce egg products safely. Although HACCP was not previously required in egg products plants, 93 percent of them are already under a HACCP system, making the cost of implementing the changes minimal.

FSIS has also realigned the regulations governing the importation and inspection of foreign egg products more closely with the regulations governing the importation of foreign meat and poultry products.

One important difference in the new rule is that FSIS will be assuming regulatory authority over egg substitutes and freeze-

Egg Inspection Modernization

dried egg products, which pose the same risk as egg products and will be inspected in the same manner, enhancing the existing food safety system. Shell eggs remain under the jurisdiction of the Food and Drug Administration.

The term "egg products" refers to eggs that have been removed from their shells for processing at facilities called "breaker plants." Egg products may be available in liquid, frozen and dried forms.

"Requiring egg product plants to develop food safety systems and procedures similar to meat and poultry requirements is a significant milestone in modernizing our inspection system," said Administrator Paul Kiecker. "FSIS is continuing to carry out its public health mission to prevent foodborne illness."

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

The paper-based version of the survey for field employees is open until Nov. 20. (If you have completed the electronic version, do not complete the paper version.) Your opinions are important to the FSIS leadership team because your feedback helps the Agency gauge progress and determine areas for improvement. Please take time to respond. The Agency is looking forward to your feedback.

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
Curley, Keith C., FI-S	Waterloo, Iowa	14	Odom Jr., Reginald W., FI-S	Bay Springs, Miss.	23
Futch, Cassie L., FI-S	Morton, Miss.	30	Philippon, Kenneth J., CSI	McCook, Ill.	40
Gahn, Henry A., SCS	Chattanooga, Tenn.	26	Schoelerman, Roger D., CSI	Des Moines, Iowa	42
Harbaugh, Patricia K., FI-S	Bay Springs, Miss.	23	Wachal, John R., SCS	Grand Island, Neb.	26
Harris, Reba B., FI-S	Enterprise, Ala.	17	Welch, Linda F., FI-S	Ashland, Ala.	22
House, Jerry G., FI-S	Bay Springs, Miss.	21	Widmer, Charles J., FI-S	Glencoe, Minn.	32
Lebron, Maxine, Case Mgmt. Spec.	Washington, D.C.	40			
Mitchell, Sharon D., FI-S	Chattanooga, Tenn.	14			

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OIEA's New Assistant Administrator

matters to them and to others," Bane said.

By continually surpassing his own and others' expectations, Bane took on additional responsibilities and managerial roles throughout the years. In OFO, he moved from a food inspector to a consumer safety inspector, a deputy district manager and a district manager. As a district manager, he directly contributed to FSIS' mission, ensuring it was fulfilled by the approximately 1,000 employees stationed at over 300 establishments in the Springdale District. In these roles, he led the implementation of significant Agency policies and programs, including the New Poultry Inspection System, the New Swine Inspection System and the Export Module of the Public Health Information System.

Earlier in 2020, Bane moved to OFO Headquarters and assumed the role of an executive associate for regulatory operations, overseeing inspection activities in nine states. He said, "These roles were opportunities that provided me with insight into

how the various parts of our Agency can best work together to accomplish our mission, as well as giving first-hand knowledge of the impact that leadership decisions have on our ability to succeed on the front lines."

In OIEA prior to his current role as assistant administrator, Bane was a compliance investigator and supervisory investigator. He said of his return to the program area, "I'm very excited to be a part of OIEA again. They are a very talented and highly motivated group of professionals, and I'm looking forward to helping them advance the Agency's goals of preventing foodborne illness and protecting public health."

Secondary Studies

Bane attended Arkansas Tech University where he studied Business Administration and Spanish. He also completed qualifications for the Consumer Safety Officer job series at Mississippi State University.

AROUND THE AGENCY

Office of Field Operations' Executive Associate for Regulatory Operations Geraldine French (pictured, center) visited inspection personnel assigned to Est. P-1304 and P-533 (employees from P-533 are not pictured), New Poultry Inspection System facilities in Fredericksburg, Pennsylvania, on Sept. 23. French also toured the plants.



Pictured, from left: CSI Matthew Huff, SPHV Jennifer Burroughs, French, Frontline Supervisor Joe Crisafulli and CSI Khaled Omar. Photo by Dr. Lynda Liljestrom, OFO.

SNAPSHOTS FROM

Hastings, Neb.

In-person contact with your leader is important for employees. It shows that they are valued, are part of the larger team working toward one purpose, and it builds morale. On Sept. 15, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) met with inspection staff at Est. M-27472, a small, beef kosher slaughter and processing plant, and discussed their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic; the use of personal protective gear; and how to mitigate heat stress issues that may arise from the additional protective equipment.



Pictured, from left: Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Jim Jochim, Food Inspectors (FI) Bill Heimonen and Edna Coronado, Consumer Safety Inspector Zachary Fries, FI Marc Stokes, Frontline Supervisor Dr. Suh Niba and Kiecker. Photo by Don Willnerd, an establishment employee.



Pictured, front row, from left: Food Inspectors (FI) George Baker, Raquel Aguirre, Kimberly Rodriguez and Mariana Sanchez Rivera. Pictured, back row, from left: FI Larry Luce, Public Health Veterinarian (PHV) Dr. Donna Swaney, Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) William Fries, Supervisory PHV Dr. Rachel Wardlow, FIs Rick Suntych and Myriam Alvarez, Supervisory CSI Dennis Houghtelling, FI Bertha Garcia and Kiecker. Photo by Dr. Suh Niba,

Grand Island, Neb.

On Sept. 15, inspection personnel at Est. M-969G, a large, high-speed, fat cattle slaughter plant, spoke with Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row, right) about their concerns that COVID-19 is impacting them and their communities. Kiecker thanked the employees for their dedication and resilience.

Fremont, Neb.

On the third day of Administrator Paul Kiecker's (pictured, right) trip, he met with Agency employees at Est. P-48304, a poultry slaughter and processing plant. While there, Kiecker toured the facility.



Pictured, from left: Consumer Safety Inspectors (CSI) Licet Palmerin, Maria Prokop, Dana Garcia and Will Jackson, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Susan Gogolski, CSIs Gary Prokop and Troy Rose, and Kiecker. Photo courtesy of Dr. Chelsea Buckley, OFO.

Tecumseh, Neb.

Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, back row, center) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row, third from left) gather here with inspection staff assigned to Est. P-20251, a poultry slaughter and processing plant.

Pictured, front row, from left: Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Mersory Rojas. Pictured, back row, from left: CSIs Bob Korth and Lance Nussbaumer, Kiecker, Dr. Brashears, CSI Raul Sanchez, Frontline Supervisor Dr. Chelsea Buckley and Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Donald Altenhofen. Photo courtesy of Dr. Chelsea Buckley, OFO.



THE FIELD



Pictured, front row seated, from left: Food Inspectors (FI) Tai Ong and Rosa Franco, and Dr. Brashears. Pictured, back row standing, from left: Supervisory Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Travis Pettis, CSI Jonah Santos, FI Juan Serrano, CSI Kirk Hagberg and Kiecker. Photos by Dr. Douglas Suntrup, OFO.

Omaha, Neb.

On Sept. 17, Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, front row seated, right) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row standing, right) stopped by to talk with FSIS inspection personnel assigned to Est. M-532, a beef slaughter and processing plant. During the visit, Dr. Brashears and Kiecker thanked the inspectors for their dedication to the mission during the pandemic.

Omaha, Neb.

Est. M-960/M-960A is a beef slaughter and processing plant where dedicated FSIS inspectors are assigned to ensure food is produced safely and animals are treated humanely. FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row, left) and Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears met with the inspectors and toured the facility on Sept. 17.



Pictured, front row, from left: Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Jamie Rhodes and Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Julie Guthrie. Pictured, back row, from left: Kiecker, Dr. Brashears, Supervisory CSI Jennifer Spies, Enforcement, Investigations and Analysis Officers Robert Rhodes and Sarah Schaub and CSI Jorge Navarro.



Grand Island, Neb.

Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) was sure to thank Consumer Safety Inspector Charles Van Ert during Kiecker's visit to Est. 47500, a very small cold storage plant on Sept. 15. Kiecker spoke with Van Ert about his FSIS career and thanked him for his efforts during these unprecedented times. Photo courtesy of Dr. Suh Niba, OFO.

Schuyler, Neb.

Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, back row, fourth from left) and Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row, third from right) ventured to the Great Plains of the United States to visit employees and tour facilities that FSIS regulates during his weeklong trip. While at Est. M-86, a large, high-speed, fat cattle slaughter and processing establishment, Dr. Brashears and Kiecker met with and thanked the inspectors for the hard work they do every day to keep the public safe.



Pictured, seated, from left: Supervisory Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Jason Pieper and Food Inspector (FI) Leslie Oldham. Pictured, second row, from left: FIs Scott Pelc, Candido Garcia, Jeimy Ortiz, Tamara Brabec, Sandy Conrad and Xiomara Villereal. Pictured, back row, from left: CSI Tim Ortmeier, FIs Jim Diekemper and Bertha Garcia, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Elizabeth Prigge, Dr. Brashears, FIs Bob Kroeger, Brooke Hoyt and Denise Marr, Kiecker and FI Roger Svatora. Photo by Dr. Suh Niba, OFO.

POLICY UPDATES

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

- Notice 42-20, Changes to Exploratory Poultry Sampling Programs
- Notice 43-20, USDA Material Management Service Center End of Fiscal Year Supplies Inventory and Reconciliation Closure
- Notice 44-20, Cut-Off Dates for Fiscal Year 2021 Purchases
- Notice 45-20, End of the Year Performance Management Instructions
- Notice 46-20, List of Electronic Communications Operations Persons
- Notice 47-20, Fiscal Year 2021 Pay Periods and Official Payday Dates
- Notice 48-20, Time and Attendance Reporting Procedures for Pay Period 20
- Notice 49-20, Implementation of the Adulterated Product Monitoring Module of the Public Health Information System
- Directive 6900.2, Rev. 3, Humane Handling and Slaughter of Livestock
- Directive 7120.1, Rev. 53, Safe and Suitable Ingredients Used in the Production of Meat, Poultry and Egg Products
- Directive 8160.1, Custom Exempt Review Process

Recent and Upcoming FSIS Meetings

Employee Town Hall Meetings

Employees only.

October 28 (Call-in numbers below. Times are Eastern Time.)

November 18 (Call-in information not yet available. Times will be the same.)

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

Access codes:

9 a.m., 6526795#.

3 p.m., 2990474#.

9 p.m., 2968416#.

Submit questions to FSISFeedback@usda.gov.

Recent Meetings

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

September 22

Transcripts and information will be 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)

October 6

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

Town Hall Round-Up

FSIS employee Town Hall Meetings are live phone conferences hosted by Agency leadership generally 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 meetings are October 28 and November 18. Please see the accompanying article above for details.

September 23 Town Hall Highlights

Expectations for Using Protective Equipment. The Administrator reminded employees that the Agency requires in-plant personnel to wear face coverings and face shields. "You may not see recommendations for the general public to wear face shields, because this recommendation is specific to our industry

given the environments in which FSIS inspection personnel and other FSIS employees work." The Agency expects supervisors to ensure that in-plant personnel are wearing the required equipment appropriately and to enforce the policy.

The Roadmap to Reducing *Salmonella*: Driving Change through Science-Based Policy. The Roadmap outlines how FSIS programs and policies reduce *Salmonella* in meat, poultry and egg products. See the Under Secretary's column on page 3 for more information and meetings information above.

Egg Products Inspection Regulations Final Rule. The finalized rule was announced Sept. 9, under which federally inspected

Continued on page 11...

egg products establishments would be required to develop and implement Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point systems and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures. 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. See the article on page 1.

Update on eDevices. FSIS had deployed eDevices for more than 1,700 food inspectors to use at 240 slaughter establishments. 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 January 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 December 31, 2020. The deferral affects what is commonly known as the employee's share of Social Security tax, which is deducted from your biweekly pay. Only those who make less than \$4,000 in a biweekly period before taxes are eligible. The \$4,000 pay determination is made after Health Benefits and Flex Plan deductions are made because they are subtracted before taxes are applied to the pay. Note that the taxes deferred must be paid back. This will automatically come out of your pay from January 1 to April 30, 2021. There is not a choice to opt-in or opt-out, and eligibility may change from pay period to pay period so it will be automatically recalculated each pay period. Your amount is listed on your biweekly earnings and leave statements as "OASDI tax." The estimated amount of the OASDI tax before the deferral is shown on your pay period 16 statement. Frequently asked questions are available at www.fsis.usda.gov/employees under FSIS Employee News as "Payroll Tax Withholding Deferral for USDA Employees."

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. The web-based FEVS runs through October 28. The paper survey is available until November 20. It takes approximately 25 minutes and should be completed during duty hours. See the Sept. 2020 *Beacon* article on page 11.

Recruitment and Retention of Public Health Veterinarians (PHV). The Agency has implemented several recruitment and retention incentives for PHVs. These include bonuses for new hires, retention incentives for current in-plant veterinarians and a student loan repayment program. Email phvincentives@usda.gov with questions, feedback or suggestions. See the July 2020 *Beacon* article on page 11.

FSIS Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Annual Plan. "Every FSIS employee should be able to connect the strategic or annual plan directly to the work that you do on a daily basis," said the Administrator. The FY21 Annual Plan will be published this fall, but we plan to share

the content with employees through your supervisors as soon as possible.

Emergency Backup Dependent Care Program. FSIS is renewing the benefit for FY21. The new year for the benefit began October 1, so all FSIS employees are eligible for up to 20 days of care for each of their dependents October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2021. See page 16 for more information about the program.

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

Questions from FSISFeedback@usda.gov

Question: "Given that the pandemic is ongoing, is the Agency considering eliminating rotations?"

Response from Phil Bronstein, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Field Operations (OFO): "OFO 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 can 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: "Even though the [face] shield and holder are only a few ounces in weight, that additional weight toward the front of the hardhat increases neck strain."

Response from Frank Mays, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Management: "We recognize that face shields might pose some inconveniences and require a period of adjustment. But they are necessary to provide in-plant personnel with the most protection possible during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Agency has in stock two different models of face shields: (1) ERB Safety Face Shields, FSIS-90, with carrier/adaptor, FSIS-90A, and (2) a new model, the Bullard Face Shield, FSIS-96, with brackets, FSIS-96-A. Employees should feel comfortable ordering alternate equipment to find the best styles and fit for your situation." Information about how to order face shields is available at www.fsis.usda.gov/employees under the "Personal Protective Gear" section.

Interest of Native American Tribes in Opening Small Plants Increases

By Tiffanie Newman, OPACE

Phone: (202) 708-8172

The Quapaw Tribe (Oklahoma) has operated a slaughter and processing establishment, the Quapaw Food Service Authority, under FSIS inspection since Sept. 2019. The plant slaughters and processes a variety of livestock, such as cattle, hogs, sheep and bison. The establishment has approximately 25 employees, with an FSIS inspector-in-charge and a frontline supervisor who provide federal inspection services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increased interest from businesses owned by Native American tribes about opening small-scale slaughter establishments. In the last six months, several tribes have contacted USDA's Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) about opening slaughter plants. Small-scale local establishments provide tribal customers from rural areas a more convenient option to have animals processed under federal inspection.

When Native American tribes contact OTR, Alexandra Tarrant, the FSIS Liaison to OTR, is ready to assist. She provides resources to assist applicants through the grant process.

Tarrant works in the FSIS Office of Field Operations and assumed the role of the FSIS Liaison to OTR in Sept. 2019. She began her federal career in the communications field with FSIS in the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education in March

2009. As part of her liaison duties, she is a member of the Native American Working Group, which meets monthly. She also meets with representatives from Native American tribes, members of the OTR staff, and FSIS district managers and assistant administrators. She coordinates conference calls and in-person meetings for OTR, tribes and the necessary FSIS representatives and provides follow-up information.

Said Tarrant, "Taking on this role has allowed me to learn new things about the Native American culture and has also given me another opportunity to use my communications skills, which is where my passion lies."

AROUND THE AGENCY

On Sep. 15, Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, second from left) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, center) were in Clay Center, Nebraska, to tour the USDA Agricultural Research Service's U.S. Meat Animal Research Center's (USMARC) Meat Safety and Quality Research Unit. They met with USMARC's Director Dr. Mark Boggess (pictured, left) and Research Leader Dr.

Tommy Wheeler (pictured, second from right) and FSIS Consumer Safety Inspector Jim Shanahan (pictured, right) and pose for a photo in front of a USMARC mural that depicts some of the center's responsibilities.

USMARC's Meat Safety and Quality Research Unit's primary objectives are to reduce the risk of foodborne illness associated with the consumption of red meat, to respond to the research needs of the USDA action and regulatory agencies, to increase efficiency of lean meat production, and to improve eating quality of meat. Photo by Alexa Johnson, ARS.



The CFC Wants FSIS to Show Some Love!

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

What is the CFC? It is the Combined Federal Campaign — the largest and most successful workplace charitable giving drive in the Nation. It provides all federal employees the opportunity to impact lives through giving to the CFC-participating charity of their choosing. The campaign's theme of *Show Some Love* invites us to *Be the Face of Change*. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, events will be held virtually so you can join the CFC community wherever you are. Visit GiveCFC.org to learn more about the 6,000 CFC charitable organizations federal employees can choose to support.

This year's campaign runs from September 21, 2020, to January 15, 2021. "Whether you are new to CFC or a longtime volunteer or donor, you know this year is as important as ever for us to unite as a federal community to *Show Some Love* by giving back to those in need. We have all relied on our networks for support through hardships and life's challenges. For some of our USDA family this year, these networks include the thousands of CFC charities that rely on us for support," said Melissa Aulisio, this year's USDA CFC Vice Chair. FSIS Campaign Co-Chairs Robert Bane and Paul Wolseley are supported by FSIS "superheroes" drawn from every program office to be force multipliers. Their enthusiasm and creativity really help make the Agency's campaigns successful.

Due to current events, many nonprofits are facing unprecedented challenges. During this year's campaign, donations to a food bank or pantry through CFC can also be recorded on the Feds Feed Families (FFF) Hub (<https://fedsfeedfamilies.ocio.usda.gov/pages/recording-and-results>). The FFF Hub will remain active all year long, so employee contributions can be counted for both the CFC and FFF campaigns.

You can help this year's CFC by giving, volunteering, becoming a campaign worker, sharing your story and engaging online. Visit GiveCFC.org to get involved and support your favorite cause. There's no better time to *Show Some Love*. Together, we can *Be the Face of Change*.



CFC logo courtesy of givecfc.org.

Employee Assistance Program

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

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

Farm Life Led Dr. Scott Updike to a Career in Food Safety

By Suzanne Hensell, OPACE

Phone: (202) 690-3626

M. Scott Updike, Ph.D., a biological scientist with the Office of Policy and Program Development's (OPPD) Risk Management and Innovations Staff (RMIS), has been with USDA for more than eight years and with FSIS more than three years. Prior to FSIS, he worked with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service on the National Organic Program as an agricultural marketing specialist where he developed regulations and guidance documents. In his current role with FSIS, he is a member of the ready-to-eat (RTE) team for cooking and stabilization. The team is revising the guidelines for establishments that cook and cool RTE foods.

The guidance documents Updike helps revise are used by many small establishments that would otherwise have difficulty obtaining scientific support for their Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point systems. Said Dr. Melvin Carter, the Director of RMIS, "Dr. Updike exemplifies humility through his kind application of knowledge during customer engagement and to his in-depth scientific approach that he applies to the research needs of the Agency. You feel his compassion and sincerity in every encounter with him."

In addition to the RTE team, Updike works with the STEC (Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli*) workgroup comprised of scientists from across the Agency. He also works with an OPPD group evaluating natural sources of nitrite/nitrate and serves as a project manager for evaluating requests to use new technology in meat and poultry establishments.

Armed with up-to-date science and processes, Updike and the team respond to askFSIS queries; answer questions from establishments and in-plant personnel (IPP) related to cooking and stabilization; identify gaps in scientific research; and help industry and academia devise research to fill those gaps.

Enjoying His Work and its Impact at FSIS

Updike finds it rewarding that the RTE team helps guide establishments that have deviations (any time that a critical operating parameter such as temperature or humidity is not met) with large amounts of product to conduct pathogen modeling. After recent storms in the Midwest resulted in power outages that shut down establishments' ovens and coolers, Updike and the team advised establishments on whether product needed to be destroyed or if it could be saved. The modeling proved that the products were safe to release to commerce, reducing food waste by hundreds of thousands of pounds. "One of the most rewarding parts of my job is when I can work with IPP and establishments through askFSIS to reduce food waste by saving product that has been through a deviation," said Updike.



M. Scott Updike, Ph.D., is a biological scientist with the Office of Policy and Program Development's Risk Management and Innovations Staff. Photo by Suzy Hammons, OPPD.

Of the four FSIS Core Values – Accountable, Collaborative, Empowered and Solutions-Oriented – Updike believes his particular job has been the most collaborative he has ever had. Said Updike, "I work with a great team of intelligent scientists who are eager to share and help with whatever task comes our way.

My coworkers are highly intelligent, and their backgrounds include having worked in the FSIS Office of Field Operations, industry, academia and the military. The team's diversity of education and experiences helps us problem solve any challenge we receive."

Lifelong Passion for Food Safety

Growing up on a livestock farm that raised sheep and cattle, Updike has known the importance of FSIS to meat safety for as long as he could remember. He attended Virginia Tech to pursue a bachelor's degree in animal and poultry science, then attended Ohio State University where he earned master's and doctorate degrees in animal science. Upon graduation, he began his career as an assistant professor with the Animal and Avian Sciences department at the University of Maryland and worked in the university's statewide Extension program performing outreach to beef producers. He then pursued a full-time job with the federal government at USDA's National Organic Program. There, he learned how government regulatory agencies worked. He then moved into a position in FSIS' OPPD to continue using his education and experience to make a positive impact on the health of the nation and on producers, particularly livestock producers. Since he grew up on a livestock farm, Updike's passion is to help livestock producers succeed and his work has allowed him to do just that. "My work has ranged from working in Extension to help educate livestock producers and working for USDA's National Organic Program to provide an alternative marketing outlet for livestock products, to working for FSIS to keep meat products safe. As an example, I still recall how the bovine spongiform

Continued on page 15...

Preparing Your 2021 Individual Development Plan.

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a clear statement of an employee's career goals. It serves as an individually tailored action plan to develop specific competencies, knowledge and skills needed to improve performance in the employee's present position or to prepare for new responsibilities. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, IDPs are required to be submitted, or noted that the employee declined, by Nov. 30. IDPs are available to any employee who requests one. This year, USDA requires all employees to complete IDP training, "Guide to Completing Your IDP," in AgLearn by Oct. 31, 2020 (aglearn.usda.gov/course/view.php?id=51719).

As you prepare your FY 2021 IDP, review IDP Frequently Asked Questions on Inside FSIS at fsishelp.fsis.usda.gov/supervisorhelp/idpfaq/. You may also want to look at the new FSIS Leadership Competency Portal (fsishelp.fsis.usda.gov/supervisorhelp/compportal/), a self-directed, interactive resource designed to help you plan your professional growth and development, identify the right training opportunities and evaluate your developmental progress. You can complete a competency self-assessment (click Leadership → Competency Portal → Take the Self-Assessment), then explore the competency model and set up your developmental goals.

For IDP questions contact Adrian.Jones@usda.gov and for general FSIS Leadership Competency Portal questions, contact Brian.Gates@usda.gov or Erin.Kersse@usda.gov.

...Continued from page 14

Faces of Food Safety

encephalopathy ("mad cow disease") presence in the United States in 2003 and 2004 hurt U.S. beef cattle producers. Maintaining high levels of food safety helps U.S. livestock producers," he said.

Updike credits his mentors, Meryl Silverman, Ph.D., and Bryan Trout, DVM, with teaching him about the policy histories for RTE and STEC. They helped him to better understand askFSIS questions and to more completely develop answers for IPP and establishments. He continues to have almost daily interaction with his former mentors.

4-H Participation is a Family Affair

Updike and his wife, Dr. Ashley Updike, a pharmacist, were involved in their local 4-H programs growing up. They each achieved "All Star" status, the highest recognition a 4-H'er can attain. As adults, they enjoy being involved with their local 4-H Club with their daughters Ella, 11, and Clara, 8. "My family moved out to rural Virginia, so our daughters could participate in 4-H to raise and show livestock. With help from my parents and my wife's parents, Ella has raised Angus heifers, market steers and market pigs for the last three years. Clara will start next year." Updike has also presented to the local 4-H Club about food safety. "While the direct audience was the 4-H kids, the indirect target was their parents back home. I hope that the outreach could prevent at least one illness," he said.

At home, he enjoys teaching his daughters about food safety. Said Updike, "I try to teach them about the scientific background on what makes food safe. Sometimes they respond, 'No, not more science.' But then weeks or months later, one of them will ask 'Tell me again about the chemistry/physics/biology about this?' One of the most satisfying parts of my job is when one of my daughters sees the USDA stamp on a meat or poultry product and says that I help to keep it safe."



RECALLS AND PUBLIC HEALTH ALERTS

September 4	FSIS issued a public health alert due to imported cooked duck blood curds from China being ineligible to import into the U.S., making the product unfit for human consumption. The product does not identify an eligible establishment number on its packaging and was not presented to FSIS for import re-inspection. FSIS has not received an official inspection certificate issued by the People's Republic of China to certify this product as eligible.
September 11	A Wisconsin establishment recalled approximately 429 pounds of fully cooked meat sausage products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen. The product contains milk (cheese), which is not declared on the packaging label.
September 16	A Massachusetts establishment recalled approximately 6,890 pounds of ready-to-eat (RTE) chicken salad products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen. The products may contain walnuts, a known allergen, which are not declared on the product labels.
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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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 Winter 2021 issue by Nov. 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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FSIS employees and applicants for employment wishing to file an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint must first contact an EEO Counselor by calling (301) 504-7755 or 1-800-269-6912, or writing to the FSIS Civil Rights Division at FSIS Civil Rights Staff at USDA/FSIS/OA, 4700 River Road, Suite 1B-01D, Mail Stop 5261, Riverdale, MD 20737. Contact must be made with an FSIS EEO Counselor within 45 calendar days of the date of the matter alleged to be discriminatory or, in the case of a personnel action, within 45 calendar days of the effective date of the personnel action.