

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, DC

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# FSIS DIRECTIVE

5620.1  
Rev.2

6/8/21

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## USING askFSIS

### I. PURPOSE

A. FSIS is reissuing this directive in its entirety to provide new instructions on how to access and use askFSIS. On February 22, 2021, askFSIS transitioned to the same data management platform and appearance as AskUSDA to enhance consistency and data sharing capacity across USDA. This directive cancels FSIS Notice 07-21, *Using askFSIS*, issued on 2/18/2021, and incorporates the instructions from the notice into this directive.

B. This directive instructs FSIS inspection program personnel (IPP) how to submit their questions using the [askFSIS web form](#) to obtain a response from the Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD). In addition, this directive instructs IPP how to find answers to common policy questions in AskUSDA.

#### KEY POINTS:

- *Access askFSIS, and submit questions*
- *Search askFSIS knowledge articles (which are Q&As) that are posted for public viewing on AskUSDA*
- *Timeframes under which IPP can expect a response from OPPD staffs*

### II. SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

A. IPP no longer need to create an account or search posted askFSIS Q&As, now called knowledge articles, to submit a question. IPP can access askFSIS and submit questions without using a password.

B. IPP cannot search for or review their previously answered questions. IPP who would like to maintain their questions and responses will need to submit written questions and print or save the e-mail responses.

C. IPP may search for posted askFSIS knowledge articles using the search feature in AskUSDA.

### III. CANCELLATION

FSIS Directive 5620.1 Rev. 1, *Using askFSIS*, 07/22/14

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**DISTRIBUTION:** Electronic

**OPI:** OPPD

## IV. BACKGROUND

A. OPPD uses askFSIS, a Web-based computer application and phone system designed to receive and respond to technical and policy-related questions from IPP, industry, and other stakeholders. OPPD uses the concerns raised by IPP in their questions to help identify the Agency's policy development needs and evaluate the effectiveness of inspection-related procedures and instructions.

B. IPP can access askFSIS to find answers to common questions by searching the AskUSDA knowledge articles. OPPD publishes cleared responses as AskUSDA knowledge articles to address common questions received from customers or to clarify policies or instructions. Official askFSIS knowledge articles can be identified by "askFSIS Public Q&A" at the beginning of the article title. Knowledge articles posted for public viewing on AskUSDA are official statements of FSIS policy.

C. The askFSIS interface provides IPP a way to get timely answers to questions that they have about notices or directives, regulatory documents, or policies. Questions submitted by IPP are not posted for public viewing, though they may form the basis for developing a public knowledge article.

D. The OPPD staffs that respond to questions submitted through askFSIS include the International Equivalence Staff (IES); Import/Export Policy Development Staff (IEPDS); Risk Management and Innovations Staff (RMIS); Labeling and Program Delivery Staff (LPDS); and the Policy Development Staff (PDS).

## V. askFSIS ACCESS

A. IPP can access [askFSIS](#) from any computer with Internet access.

B. The askFSIS web page (<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/contact-us/askfsis>) is available through the "Start" button on FSIS computers (Start/FSIS Applications/askFSIS). IPP may also access askFSIS using the "Contact Us" tab at the top of the [FSIS home page](#) and scrolling down to the askFSIS button.

## VI. SEARCHING askFSIS ONLINE KNOWLEDGE ARTICLES

A. IPP can find answers to hundreds of common questions by using the AskUSDA knowledge article search feature. Use of the searchable knowledge articles posted for public viewing in AskUSDA can save IPP time when seeking information. OPPD encourages IPP to search the knowledge articles for answers to questions on topics such as exporting, importing, labeling, sampling, and other inspection-related policies, programs, and procedures. To search for posted askFSIS knowledge articles, IPP are to:

1. Navigate to [AskUSDA](#);
2. Begin the search with "askFSIS;" and
3. Enter words or issuance numbers (e.g., meat, *E.coli* O157:H7, 10,010.1, or recalls) that will help limit the search to the desired subject matter, then hit enter.

B. AskUSDA will return a list of knowledge articles that it finds in response to the submitted search terms.

C. If, after reviewing the search results, IPP still need assistance, they are to return to the [askFSIS](#) page to submit a question by following the instructions in Section VII. below.

D. IPP are not to use the “Chat with an Expert” feature on the AskUSDA web page because askFSIS does not support the chat option at this time.

## VII. SUBMITTING QUESTIONS THROUGH askFSIS

A. To submit a question, IPP are to access the web form at <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/contact-us/askfsis>;

B. When submitting a question, IPP are to complete the following fields (required fields are marked with an asterisk\*):

1. First Name\*;
2. Last Name\*;
3. Email\*: enter a valid e-mail address – this is where askFSIS will send the response;
4. Phone number\*: (use the format XXX-XXX-XXXX);
5. Subject\*: enter a brief subject for the question. The subject line is to include words that are related to the question being submitted and, if applicable, the directive or notice number that is relevant to the question. The information included on the Subject line is to be specific to the question being asked. For example, if the question is about the regulatory requirements regarding the labeling of pepperoni, the subject line should be “Pepperoni Labeling” and not “HACCP”. Following this approach will help expedite assigning each question to the most appropriate staff officer in OPPD;
6. Details/Question\*: IPP are to enter their question here. IPP are to provide as much detail as possible for the staff officer to be able to respond accurately to the question. When critical details are omitted, the answer received may not be appropriate for the question submitted. Details in the question are necessary for staff officers to provide an accurate response, especially when the question may relate to an enforcement action, (e.g., a Notice of Intended Enforcement), regulatory waivers, or other local conditions that may be in effect in an establishment;
7. Inquiry Type\*: select the appropriate entry from the drop-down menu;
8. Customer Type\*: select the appropriate entry from the drop-down menu;
9. Policy Area\*: select the appropriate entry from the drop-down menu;
10. Impacted Zip Code\*: enter the impacted zip code (i.e., the zip code of the establishment or other location where the question applies). This may not be the zip code where the question submitter is located;
11. Country: select the country from the drop-down menu if outside the United States;
12. Establishment Size: select the Establishment Size (if applicable) from the drop-down menu;
13. Establishment Number Prefix: select the appropriate entry from the drop-down menu (if

applicable). This corresponds to the grant type (e.g., M for red meat establishments, P for poultry establishments, G for egg products establishments, I for import inspection establishments) or voluntary service (V). If the question applies to more than one establishment, just enter one affected establishment;

14. Establishment Number: enter the establishment number (if applicable). If the question applies to more than one establishment, just enter one affected establishment;

15. Complete the reCAPTCHA challenge\*; and

16. Click submit.

**NOTE:** IPP will not be able to submit their question until all the required fields identified by an asterisk on the web form are complete. If the submit button is not visible, one or more of the required fields is incomplete.

C. Once submitted, the system automatically creates a unique case number for that question and emails a response to IPP.

D. The web form cannot accept attachments. When IPP would like to submit an attachment with their question, they are to reply to the automatic acknowledgement e-mail. The acknowledgement e-mail contains instructions for submitting attachments with the question. The e-mail and the attachments cannot exceed 25MB. Any attachments that exceed 25MB will need to be sent in multiple e-mails.

E. IPP may also contact askFSIS by calling 1-800-233-3935.

F. OPPD generally responds to IPP questions within two business days.

G. OPPD staff officers strive to provide consistent responses, and they use a number of tools to achieve that goal, including searching responses provided to similar questions that have been submitted by both IPP and other askFSIS users. In addition, staff officers correlate daily within and between staffs to assure consistency. Because each response is specific to the information provided, responses provided may not be directly applicable to a different situation.

H. OPPD staff officer responses are sent to the e-mail address entered on the web form.

I. When the staff officer provides a response to IPP, the e-mail does not include the name of the staff officer that developed the response. Responses provided through askFSIS represent a response from OPPD and not from a specific staff officer.

**NOTE:** If IPP know the name of a specific staff officer that they would like to respond to a question, they can include it in the subject line, and the question will be directed to the staff officer if that staff officer is available. In addition, occasionally IPP submit questions directly to staff officers through Outlook instead of using askFSIS. Because askFSIS is the Agency's mechanism for evaluating policy effectiveness and for tracking policy trends, IPP will be directed to resubmit their question through askFSIS instead of through Outlook.

J. Once a response has been received, IPP can submit follow-up questions or additional information associated with the original question by replying to the e-mailed answer.

K. IPP who would like to maintain their questions and responses are to print or save the e-mail responses they receive. IPP cannot search for or review their previously answered questions in the new askFSIS platform.

L. IPP are to submit new questions on different topics separately instead of updating an existing submission. Submitting separate questions as described in this section increases the efficiency of the system, expedites providing a response, and improves data analysis.

### **VIII. PROVIDING FEEDBACK**

IPP are to submit feedback on posted askFSIS knowledge articles using the askFSIS webform.

### **IX. DATA ANALYSIS**

In order to assess the needs of IPP using this system, OPPD will analyze the questions received through askFSIS. OPPD will specifically review askFSIS data related to FSIS notices and directives to determine if trends exist in the frequency or type of policy cited in the submitted questions. These analyses will be used, in part, to determine the effectiveness of the askFSIS system and to make changes to FSIS issuances as warranted by the analyses.

### **X. QUESTIONS**

Refer questions regarding this directive to your supervisor, or to the Office of Policy and Program Development through [askFSIS](#) or by telephone at 1-800-233-3935. When submitting a question, complete the [web form](#) and select General Inspection Policy for the inquiry type.



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