

The Beacon

PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH FOOD SAFETY

December 2020

SNIPPET OF CURRENT ISSUE

With the successful deployment of eDevices completed, this is the last printed issue of *The Beacon* to be distributed by mail. Modernization by providing all employees email access allows everyone to receive a copy via email beginning with the January issue.

On Nov. 30, 2020, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) and Office of Field Operations Assistant Administrator Dr. Philip Bronstein (pictured, left) recognized Alameda District Manager Dr. Yudhbir Sharma for his contribution to the FSIS mission and 32 years of Federal service. Dr. Sharma plans to retire on Dec. 31, 2020. Photo by Michael Khoshaba, OFO.



Selecting A Prime Choice: Carrying Out FSIS and AMS Duties Makes the Grade

By Leo O'Drudy, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-8693

One of FSIS' sister agencies within USDA is the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Among the services AMS provides to American agriculture is to grade meat and poultry products for quality, such as traits related to tenderness, juiciness and flavor of meat, while using consistent criteria applied nationwide.

Mandatory FSIS inspection is not charged to the establishment because it is paid for by taxpayers. However, AMS grading is voluntary and must be paid for by the establishment.

For more information about the differences between FSIS and AMS, see <https://go.usa.gov/x7GP8>.

A small or very small plant might not be able to pay for a full-time AMS grader, especially if there are added expenses involved with traveling to and from the establishment. This can leave smaller firms at a disadvantage in the marketplace, compared to those whose meat and poultry

products bear an AMS-provided USDA grade mark, such as Prime.

However, there is a solution to this problem. FSIS and AMS have an interagency agreement. FSIS Directives 5110.2 and 5110.3 provide instructions to cross-utilize personnel to carry out tasks on behalf of both agencies. AMS graders may perform certain FSIS inspection duties, and conversely for FSIS inspectors to perform certain AMS grading duties. Because of the interagency agreement, an FSIS inspector can carry out AMS grading services on a part-time basis, making those grading services more affordable.

One such inspector is FSIS Consumer Safety Inspector Andrew Rector. Over the summer he began partnering with AMS to provide USDA grading services to a very small lamb processor in Oregon. Rector was cross trained in grading methodology so he can provide carcass grading services in an area hundreds of miles from the nearest grader, thus allowing small processors access to this USDA service.

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.

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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.

Feb. issue – due Jan. 1 Mar. issue – due Feb. 1
Apr. issue – due Mar. 1 May issue – due Apr. 1

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

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SPOTLIGHT

2020: Broad Success in Modernization

By Laura Reiser, OPACE

Phone: (202) 720-7894

As a foundational piece of the Agency's strategic plan, FSIS modernization efforts were successful throughout 2020. Under Secretary for Food Safety, Dr. Mindy Brashears has said, "As food safety challenges evolve, FSIS uses science and data to modernize inspection systems, laboratory and sampling methods and communications to meet consumer needs and protect public health."

FSIS achieved success in advancing modernization in 2020. "Employees in every part of FSIS have made this success happen — from the field, laboratories and headquarters," said Administrator Paul Kiecker.

Priorities for the year included several aspects of the Agency's work:

- Modernizing egg products inspection to require egg product establishments to develop Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (Sanitation SOPs) and other changes to be consistent with the meat and poultry regulations.
- Continuing progress for innovation of slaughter inspection for multiple species.
- Revising performance standards and expanding testing to advance the fight against pathogens.
- Using technology to keep all Agency personnel readily connected to communications and resources.

Salmonella

In September, Dr. Brashears released the comprehensive Roadmap to Reducing *Salmonella*: Driving Change through Science-Based Policy. "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," said Dr. Brashears. "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*. The Roadmap showcases our holistic approach to *Salmonella* control and innovation. It clarifies the Agency's activities that contribute to pathogen reduction." The Roadmap was the focal point of a virtual public meeting hosted by the Office of Food Safety and FSIS.

Public comments were received from various stakeholders on the data and science that drive FSIS' *Salmonella* reduction efforts. The meeting attracted approximately 850 attendees. At the meeting, 33 persons provided comments and 38 comments were received through www.regulations.gov.

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Under Secretary's Column

At the beginning of the year, I announced my 2020 Food Safety Vision with three foundational pillars:

- 1) Leading with Science.
- 2) Building Relationships.
- 3) Influencing Behavior Changes.



Dr. Mindy Brashears

We moved forward with that charge to keep the meat, poultry and egg supply safe. When I began writing the Vision near the end of 2019, never did I consider the possibility of a global pandemic or how it would impact FSIS and our lives. The foundational pillars have served us well during this unprecedented time. However, after reflecting on the things I have seen and learned during the pandemic, I have come to realize that we need to add a fourth pillar: Nurturing Resiliency.

It is often said that people are resistant to change. In 2020, we were all forced to change. Our workforce exhibited an immeasurable level of resiliency and adaptability. Few in the public will know about the behind-the-scenes dedication to ensure a safe food supply, but I saw it firsthand and it was amazing. I watched inspectors fill in to protect fellow employees at higher risk. Lab workers stayed in the lab to process samples while friends and neighbors teleworked. District Office staff and colleagues from other USDA agencies helped where needed. Headquarters and public affairs staff pivoted to new modes of communication, meeting a plethora of needs. Policy and labeling staff worked endlessly to facilitate means to safely divert products from food service to grocery stores. Agency scientists kept abreast of emerging information to ensure we led with science. We collaborated with various partners to provide protective equipment and supplies to keep inspectors safe.

Your work ensured there was never a major shortage of safe meat or poultry. Secretary Perdue, FSIS leaders and I have seen your dedication and we are grateful. In 2020, we led with science, built relationships and influenced behavior changes, but most of all, we were resilient. It has been my honor to watch it happen. Well done, FSIS. Keep up the great work!

Administrator's Column

I am excited to announce that FSIS is conducting most of our training virtually now. FSIS began transitioning to online training about a year ago, which conveniently positioned the Agency to convert training courses to an online format in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Paul Kiecker

Online training courses conducted include Inspection Methods (IM), Public Health Veterinarian (PHV), and Enforcement, Investigations and Analysis Officer (EIAO).

In response to training demands, we are offering the Further Processing and Labeling course monthly. For efficiency, we incorporated on-the-job training (OJT) components into the virtual training courses. We are also working on refresher courses on Imports, In-Plant Safety and other topics. Virtual classes delivered so far include seven IM, three PHV and two EIAO courses.

The online training courses were designed with in-plant personnel (IPP) schedules in mind and as a result, the online courses are flexible and facilitate efficient use of time. For example, IPP can complete the online Electronic Export Training over a two-week period, whenever it fits into their schedule.

In the spring, look for an announcement for the competitive virtual FSIS Escalade Leadership Development Program. Current and aspiring leaders who are GS-9 to GS-13 employees or O-3 and O-4 Commissioned Corps officers are encouraged to apply for this program.

If you're an experienced supervisor, the annual Experienced Supervisor Training Program requirement can be met by either self-nominating for the virtual pilot to be launched in March 2021 or by completing the AgLearn curriculum at <https://fsishelp.fsis.usda.gov/supervisorhelp/expsttraining/index.html> by Sept. 30, 2021. For new supervisors, a virtual New Supervisor Training Program pilot will be introduced in January 2021.

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Inspection Systems

Egg Products. In October 2020, the final rule to modernize egg products inspection was published. It removes prescriptive regulations, expands HACCP and Sanitation SOP requirements to egg products plants, and makes other changes to make the egg products regulations consistent with meat and poultry regulations. This fosters innovation by moving FSIS from prescribing hazard reduction measures to a HACCP-based system, aligning egg products regulations with meat and poultry regulations. (See the feature on page 1 of the October *Beacon* on InsideFSIS ([inside.fsis.usda.gov](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/inside)). FSIS has staggered the rule's effective dates to give establishments more time to comply with the new Sanitation SOP and HACCP requirements. Several changes take effect on December 28, 2020; however, changes related to Sanitation SOPs and HACCP will take effect on October 29, 2021, and October 31, 2022, respectively.

Beef Slaughter. FSIS moved forward with preparations to modernize its beef slaughter inspection system. Modernizing will provide a more effective use of the Agency's inspection personnel and resources, and it removes unnecessary regulatory obstacles to innovation. FSIS has the authority to grant a waiver to allow experimentation when innovation is limited by current regulatory requirements. In March, FSIS announced that it granted a waiver to a beef slaughter establishment. Under the waiver, FSIS inspectors will continue to conduct ante-mortem inspection and carcass-by-carcass inspection of every animal as required by law. FSIS intends to use the data collected from beef slaughter establishments that are granted these waivers to inform future rulemaking, if supported.

Swine Slaughter Inspection. The Agency continued to move forward with developing and implementing modernized inspection systems for swine slaughter. In October 2019, FSIS published the final rule "Modernization of Swine Slaughter Inspection." The final rule is comprised of two parts: mandatory microbial testing requirements at all swine establishments and the New Swine Slaughter Inspection System (NSIS), which establishments can choose to operate under, or they can remain under the traditional

slaughter inspection system. Since the implementation of the NSIS, five HACCP-Based Inspection Models Project (HIMP) plants and two non-HIMP plants converted to NSIS in fiscal year 2020. Under NSIS, FSIS will increase offline inspection tasks that have a direct impact on public health while maintaining 100 percent ante-mortem inspection and carcass-by-carcass inspection.

Performance Standards and Pathogen Testing for Beef

Shiga-Toxin Producing *E. coli* (STEC) Testing. On June 4, 2020, FSIS proposed expanding the testing for non-O157 Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli* (STEC) to all raw beef products FSIS currently tests for *E. coli* O157:H7. Presently, FSIS only tests beef manufacturing trimming for non-O157 STEC. FSIS proposed to expand this analysis to ground beef, bench trim and raw ground beef components.

Communications and Technology

eDevices. FSIS completed distribution of electronic devices (eDevices) to employees in all districts. The Agency invested in eDevices to help employees have ready access to important information and training opportunities. They can function as 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 internet access to complete tasks such as AgLearn trainings and submitting timesheets electronically in WebTA.

eCertification, Electronic Export Application and the PHIS Export Module

FSIS continued to modernize its import and export certification processes through government-to-government exchange of electronic certification (eCert), which reduces paper use, improves efficiency and enhances security. The Agency receives import eCert data in the Public Health Information System (PHIS) for imports from Australia, the Netherlands and New Zealand, and FSIS is actively seeking more countries to participate. For exports, FSIS implemented electronic export applications with the PHIS Export Module for many countries and is moving toward using

For a complete list of online courses, please visit the Fiscal Year 2021 Training Calendar at <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/f7615b3d-fd62-4de5-86d1-6ed937165bca/training-calendar.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>.

Thank you all for your resilience throughout this year and your flexibility in adapting to a more virtual format for training. Best wishes to all of you for a happy holiday season.

Correction from November 2020 Issue: Under Secretary's Awards and Administrator's Awards for Excellence

The Beacon's November 2020 cover story, "Honoring FSIS Employees at the Highest Level," did not include two award recipients: Elizabeth Simmons and Bradley Koenigsknecht. *The Beacon* editorial staff apologizes to Ms. Simmons and Dr. Koenigsknecht for the error and wants to recognize them for supporting the food safety mission with stellar customer service, innovative work projects and other achievements. This is the information regarding their awards.

Employee of the Year (Non-In-Plant)

Elizabeth Simmons received the Administrator's Award for Excellence and the Under Secretary's Award for exceptional achievements in accelerating the hiring process and reducing inspector vacancy rates. Simmons is a Management Analyst in the Office of Field Operations, Springdale District.



Leader of the Year (In-Plant)

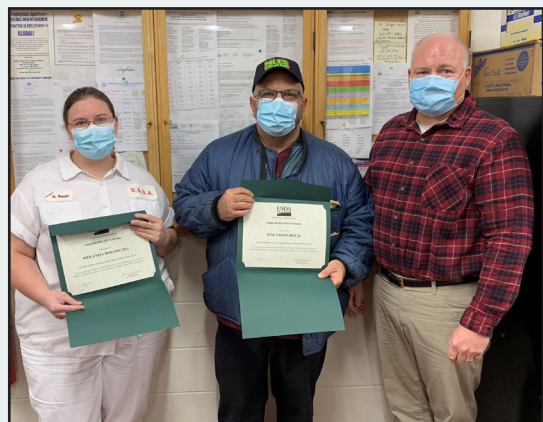
Bradley Koenigsknecht received the Administrator's Award for Excellence for exemplary leadership and dedication to public service and FSIS' public health mission. Koenigsknecht was a Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian in the Office of Field Operations. He is now with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.



AROUND THE AGENCY

While visiting inspection staff in the Chicago District on Oct. 27, Administrator Paul Kiecker presented certificates and awards to employees who were nominated for this year's Administrator's Awards for Excellence and Under Secretary's Awards, and he thanked each person for their dedication to the Agency's mission. Kiecker also made time to discuss the importance of properly wearing personal protective gear, provided updates on hazard pay and the upcoming conversion of egg plants to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) systems.

Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) visited inspectors and presented an Administrator's Award and an Under Secretary's Award for Excellence in Food Safety to (pictured, left) Consumer Safety Inspectors Thomas Kersjes, (pictured, center) Dominic Bushouse and (pictured, third, from right) Kenneth Elliott, who are assigned to Establishment P-20935, a poultry slaughter and processing plant in Wyoming, Michigan. Pictured, right: Kiecker gathered here with (pictured, from left) Consumer Safety Inspectors Kersjes, Marge Cook, Alain Mora (holding Dominic Bushouse's award certificate), Bushouse and Elliott and Supervisory Veterinary Medical Officer Dr. Robert Sprik. Photo by Dr. Ryan Lundquist, OFO.



At Establishment M-562, a beef slaughter and processing plant in Plainwell, Michigan, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) presented the Administrator's Award and an Under Secretary's Award for Excellence in Food Safety to Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Miranda Boomstra (pictured, left) and Consumer Safety Inspector Tim Stonerock (pictured, center). Boomstra and Stonerock also won the Administrator's Award for Excellence in Food Safety, as did the rest of the Grand Rapids Circuit, First Shift Inspection Team (not pictured). Photo by Dr. Ryan Lundquist, OFO.

SNAPSHOTS FROM

Hudsonville, Mich.

On Oct. 27, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, left) visited employees at Establishment M/P-5694A and took a tour of the ready-to-eat processing plant.



Pictured, from left: Kiecker, Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Charles Clement, Supervisory Veterinary Medical Officer Dr. Leslie Luscher, CSI Spencer Clement, Frontline Supervisor Dr. Ryan Lundquist and CSI Ron Cauthen. Photo courtesy of Dr. Ryan Lundquist, OFO.

Holland, Mich.

Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row, left) met with the Grand Rapids Team assigned to Establishment M/P-17644A, a ready-to-eat processing plant, and presented the Administrator's Award and an Under Secretary's Award for Excellence in Food Safety to (pictured, front row from left) Consumer Safety Inspectors Kristin Overhiser, Shai Donaldson and (pictured, front row, right) David Ellefson. CSI Aamen Blattner is pictured in the back row on the right.



Pictured, front row, from left: Overhiser and Donaldson, Supervisory Veterinary Medical Officer Dr. Sarah Gale and Ellefson. Pictured, back row, from left: Kiecker and Blattner. Photo by Dr. Ryan Lundquist, OFO.

Detroit, Mich.

On Oct. 28, Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, left) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) visited employees and toured Establishment M/P-2574, a lamb and veal slaughter plant. While there, Dr. Brashears and Kiecker met with Food Inspector Kat Angell and discussed career paths that are available within the Agency. Photo by Dennis Wlasiuk, OFO.



Oak Park, Mich.

On Oct. 28, Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, second from right) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) took a moment to take a photo with (OIEA) Office of Investigations, Enforcement and Audit Investigator James Lappin and Supervisor Krishna Cabine. The OIEA staff participated in the Office of Field Operations' work unit meeting. Photo by Dennis Wlasiuk, OFO



THE FIELD



Oak Park, Mich.

Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, seated, right) and FSIS Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row, center) joined employees at the Dearborn and East Lansing Circuits' combined work unit meeting on Oct. 28. Dr. Brashears and Kiecker discussed Agency directives and the continued effort to modernize inspection systems. Employees had an opportunity to ask questions of Dr. Brashears and FSIS leadership.

Pictured, seated, front row from left: Frontline Supervisor (FLS) Dennis Wlasiuk, Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) Sarfraz Choudhri and Dr. Brashears. Pictured, standing, first row from left: CSI Bertrelle Shelby, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian (SPHV) Dr. Heather Grodi, CSIs Jamie Little and Rene Collins, SPHV Dr. Megan Uitvlugt, CSI Daniela Capatana and FLS Dr. Jenifer Tolan. Pictured, standing, second row from left: CSI Michael Raymond, Enforcement Investigations and Analysis Officer Shelia McMillan, CSIs Christopher Hang and George Gegich, Import Food Inspectors (FI) Aneel Khan and Juan Garcia and CSI Marco Cervantes. Pictured, back row from left: CSI Angela Wininger, FLS Raymond. Photo courtesy of Dennis Wlasiuk, OFO.



Port Huron, Mich.

During a visit to Establishment M-10105, a bacon processing plant, Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, seated, left) and Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, back row, right) took a group photo with Frontline Supervisor Dr. Jenifer Tolan, (pictured, seated, right), and Consumer Safety Inspectors Jean-Marc Patten and William Miller (pictured, back row, from left). The group, along with other inspectors, discussed several topics including the importance of wearing personal protective equipment. Photo by a plant employee.



Okemos, Mich.

On Oct. 26, Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right) met with employees at M/P-48291, a meat and poultry processing plant. During the visit, Kiecker spoke about FSIS' ongoing commitment to support the needs of its employees.

Pictured, from left: Consumer Safety Inspector Tim Hardy, Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian Bryan Voetberg and Kiecker. Photo by Tina Conklin, director of Michigan State University Food Processing and Innovation Center.

Flint, Mich.

On Oct. 29, Frontline Supervisor Dr. Jenifer Tolan (pictured, second from left) and Consumer Safety Inspector Doug Jackson (pictured, second from right), assigned to Establishment M/P-10001, a meat and poultry processing plant, pose with Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Mindy Brashears (pictured, left) and Administrator Paul Kiecker (pictured, right). During a visit with Agency leaders, the group discussed the monthly town hall calls and the new performance rating and awards system. Photo courtesy of Dr. Jenifer Tolan.

