Planning RLM or IVT Sampling
What do I do Now?

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Steps to Sampling

- Plan ahead and stay organized!
- Contact the in-plant inspection team.
- Schedule the date for sampling and order supplies
- Notify plant management.
- Assemble a team.
- Conduct Entrance Meeting with the establishment.
- Take walk through, consider where and what to sample.
- Organize sampling supplies.
- Collect/Submit samples.

Example questions for IPP:
- What is the size of the establishment?
- How many RTE lines do they utilize?
- What RLM or IVT eligible products are produced?
- What are their PLE, RTE production processes, e.g., is brine or a PLT utilized, are they freezing, drying, fermenting, etc.?
- What are the production schedules of those products?
- How are the products packaged, e.g., size?
- Is the establishment Kosher? (DE broth is not Kosher.)
- What is the FSIS and establishment sampling history?
- What issues have they had? What concerns do you have?
- Consider FedEx. Do they pick up or will you have to drop off? When?
Scheduling a Sampling Date

At least 2 weeks prior to the week of sampling, submit an email to the correct address in Outlook:

For RLms:
manually enter RLMSampleScheduling@usda.gov
or search using "FSIS - RLM Sample Scheduling"

For IVTs:
manually enter IVTSampleScheduling@usda.gov
or search using "FSIS - IVT Sample Scheduling"

Ordering Supplies

• Ordering supplies and requesting a sampling date are done simultaneously.
• Attach a questionnaire to your email.
• Use prompts to ensure all necessary information is included:
  • Proposed collection date and shift.
  • Number of sample units required.
  • Designated field laboratory.
  • Establishment number.
  • Your contact information (cell).

Ordering Supplies

Prompts continued:
• Physical location to send supplies:
  • Can be office, home, or the establishment, but supplies must be checked on day of receipt.
  • Refrigerate pre-moistened swabs and/or broth upon delivery for long term storage.
  • Can be held at room temperatures for short term but must ensure no temperature abuse.
• Requests for special supplies:
  • Consider product package size ahead of scheduling. Are more or larger shipping containers needed?
  • Is a kosher broth needed?
  • Are brine sampling supplies needed?
Receiving the Supplies

- Supplies are typically mailed within a few days of the lab’s emailed confirmation of a sampling date.
- If supplies are not received, inquire by resubmitting the lab confirmation response and a copy of the questionnaire back to the appropriate mailbox.
- If you receive the supplies, but did not receive everything you need, reply to the lab’s confirmation response to tell them what you’re missing ASAP.

Notifying Plant Management

- For IVTs
  - provide 48 hours advance notice or enough time to hold product, but not enough time to change practices.
- For RLms
  - provide one-week advance notice.

Assembling the Team

- Identify team members. May include in-plant FSIS personnel.
- Assign roles to team members.
- Possible team member roles:
  - Team Leader/ Sample Collector (EIAO).
  - Sample Collector Assistant (CSI, PHV, IIC, FLS, etc.).
  - Forms Assistant – complete and double check forms, pack, and prepare samples for shipment.
Entrance Meeting at the Establishment

Review the “Entrance Letter to Establishment Management” with plant personnel;
- RTE product, food contact, and environmental samples will be collected.
- Production lot(s) must be held.
- Equipment does not need to be rinsed after each sample is taken because Dey Engley (DE) broth is considered GRAS.
- Most negative results are published within 3 days.
- A RTE product lot is usually defined as all product produced from clean-up to clean-up.

Reconfirm that the establishment will be producing post-lethality exposed, RTE product on the day that the IVT or Rlm sampling has been scheduled.

Ask the establishment if there have been any changes to its documented production, sanitation, or food safety practices.

Ask where records are held.

At the Establishment

- Ask where records are held.
- Take a “walk through” with plant management to familiarize and help develop a sampling plan.
- Review the establishment’s Listeria sampling program and previous results.
  - What sites have previously tested positive?
  - Are samples being collected as required?
  - Are all possible FCS sampling sites represented?
  - Are samples and supplies being handled, stored, and shipped appropriately?
Establishment Walk Through

- Identify RTE areas and determine which products are processed in each area;
- Processing
- Cooking
- Packaging
- Coolers and/or freezers
- Related RTE storage areas
  - packaging supply storage
  - Ingredient storage
  - finished product storage
- Scope out possible Listeria niches and harborage, e.g., look for hard to clean, damp areas.

Determine Where You Might Sample

- Identify possible sampling sites.
- Think through a general sampling plan, i.e., where and when.
- Allow for flexibility.
- Final sample site selection should be based on your knowledge, experience, and your observations.
  - Areas that are difficult to clean and sanitize, e.g., behind shields, cracks, crevices, floor-wall junctions, drains, etc.
  - Surfaces with a lot of employee contact.
  - Employee behavior at time of sampling.
  - Movement of people, equipment, and supplies at time of sampling.
  - Moisture, condensation, drips, etc., at time of sampling.

Pre-Sampling Preparation

- Final double check to ensure that you have everything needed for sampling.
- Begin “staging” and labeling the supplies.
- Organize using your sampling template sheets.
- Determine how you will store the samples before shipping, i.e., secure and refrigerated.
- Double check Fed-ex pick-up logistics.
- Discuss team members roles/responsibilities.
- Possibly practice aseptic technique and swabbing with your team.
### Sampling Template Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishes Name/Number</th>
<th>RLMCONT</th>
<th>Line #</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sample Set # Indoor</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sample Set # Indoor</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sample Set # Indoor</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### RLM Sampling Est. 0000 / ABC Food Corp

#### RLMCONT Line 1 / Packing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time / Shift</th>
<th>Room / Line</th>
<th>Laboratory Form#</th>
<th>Sampling Site Description</th>
<th>Type of Sample</th>
<th>Bar Code Label#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
<td>0900 / 1st</td>
<td>Packing / 1</td>
<td>11000243</td>
<td>Splitter blade</td>
<td>CONT</td>
<td>632831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
<td>1145 / 1st</td>
<td>Cooler / 1</td>
<td>11000248</td>
<td>Probe thermometer # 4</td>
<td>CONT</td>
<td>632836</td>
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<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
<td>0900 / 1st</td>
<td>Packing / 1</td>
<td>11000264</td>
<td>Packing room wash hose</td>
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<td>632892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
<td>1130 / 1st</td>
<td>Slicing / 2</td>
<td>11000275</td>
<td>Sliced Roast Beef</td>
<td>CONT</td>
<td>632903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
<td>1145 / 1st</td>
<td>Slicing / 2</td>
<td>11000276</td>
<td>Sliced Roast Beef</td>
<td>CONT</td>
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### RLM Sampling Est. 0000 / ABC Food Corp

#### RLmENVVC Line 1 / Packing

<table>
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<th>Time / Shift</th>
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<th>Laboratory Form#</th>
<th>Sampling Site Description</th>
<th>Type of Sample</th>
<th>Bar Code Label#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
<td>1100 / 1st</td>
<td>Packing / 1</td>
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<td>Probe thermometer # 1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>632893</td>
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<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
<td>1150 / 1st</td>
<td>Packing / 1</td>
<td>11000266</td>
<td>Packing room refriger. unit</td>
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<td>632894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
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<td>Packing / 1</td>
<td>11000267</td>
<td>Packing room door</td>
<td>CONT</td>
<td>632895</td>
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</tbody>
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### RLM Sampling Est. 0000 / ABC Food Corp

#### RLmPROD Line 2 / Slicing

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Time / Shift</th>
<th>Room / Line</th>
<th>Laboratory Form#</th>
<th>Sampling Site Description</th>
<th>Lot Number</th>
<th>Bar Code Label#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/13/07</td>
<td>0900 / 1st</td>
<td>Slicing / 2</td>
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<td>Sliced Roast Beef</td>
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<td>632904</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1100 / 1st</td>
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<td>11000275</td>
<td>Sliced Roast Beef</td>
<td>4384</td>
<td>632903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collecting Samples

- Some samples may be collected at pre-op., but most should be collected during production, during breaks if possible.
- Establishment must be producing FSIS amenable product. Must be post-lethality exposed for RLm sampling.
- With justification, you may sample a line that is not currently being used.
  - Notate this on sampling sheets.
  - Inform the lab before samples arrive that no product samples will be submitted with the unit.

Collecting Samples

- Each unit of samples should all be associated with a single line, a single lot, and a single production Alternative.

- Can collect samples anywhere FSIS, RTE products or equipment are processed or held (coolers, hallways, production rooms).

- If the number of FCSs is very limited, then sample those same sites at different times throughout the day of production.
  - Each sample is just a snapshot in time.
  - The timing of your sample collection can be important.

Collect the Samples

- Generally, collect samples closest to the product first and move out.
- Generally, collect NFCS, environmental samples from areas closest to processing lines, but you can possibly sample in other areas.
- Can sample hands, gloves, aprons, etc.
  - May be FCS or NFCS, depending observations.
- Briefly notate and justify sampling locations for future reference.
**Brine Samples**

- Collect one brine sample per unit or line (depending on number of brine chillers in use).
- If the casing is **permeable or semi-permeable** then the brine is considered a food contact surface (FCS) sample.
- If the casing is **impermeable** then the brine is considered a non-food-contact surface sample (NFCS).

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**Summary**

- Pre-planning is an essential part of the RLm or IVT sampling processes.
- A team approach is recommended.
- Team member roles should be well-defined, prior to the start of sampling.
- Effective communication with both plant management and team members is critical throughout the entire process.