Food safety was prominent in the annual USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum this year, with not one, but two panel sessions on the topic. Bundled together with a third session hosted by USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), they constituted their own food safety “track” of sessions.

The Forum was held on Feb. 22 and 23, in Arlington, Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C. FSIS joined other USDA agencies in hosting sessions on current agricultural topics. Typical attendees of the Forum include scientists; government employees; and people from major agricultural firms, agriculture trade associations, agriculture-oriented media outlets and non-profit groups such as consumer and environmental organizations. USDA has made an effort in recent years to encourage attendance by students, farmers and ranchers.

At the first food safety session, “Emerging Issues in Food Safety,” Acting Deputy Under Secretary Carmen Rottenberg spoke on data driven modernization initiatives, explaining how FSIS is modernizing poultry, swine and egg product inspection. She also highlighted the Agency’s progress in adopting whole genome sequencing and participation with USDA’s regulatory reform task force. Finally, she touched on how FSIS engages the public by researching consumer behaviors and modern communication methods, a theme that would be expanded on in the second session.

Continued on page 8...
Secretary Perdue wrapped up his third “Back to Our Roots” RV tour in early April after visiting USDA customers and employees in Michigan, Ohio and Kentucky (see photo on page 15). The Secretary uses these tours as an opportunity to hear directly from the American people and USDA employees across the country, as part of a widespread effort to ensure the best customer service experience possible. Like the Secretary, we find when we travel to events and establishments in the field, we have a fantastic opportunity to interact on a personal level with employees, listen to your thoughts and concerns, and express our appreciation for your dedicated service.

Customer service in FSIS is closely intertwined with employee engagement: our employees are also our customers. In order to help you provide excellent customer service to our external stakeholders, it’s our priority to provide the best possible customer service to you, our employees. It’s our priority to ensure that you are heard and feel empowered to make suggestions and raise issues.

Goal 3 in the FSIS Strategic Plan, “Achieve Operational Excellence,” focuses on achieving success and accomplishing our food safety mission by relying on our workforce and support systems. We are committed to recruiting and retaining a talented and motivated workforce to support our goals. A critical part of our mission is to better equip employees with the tools and resources they need to efficiently and effectively perform their jobs. You’ll see in this issue of The Beacon that we’ve launched the e-Device pilot at two locations and are excited to have these devices in the hands of field personnel. This is just one way we’re addressing a concern for electronic access and the desire for greater communication, which has been raised to us by employees whom we’ve visited in the field.

We look forward to continuing our mission to protect the public’s health, while embodying the Secretary’s OneUSDA vision to do right and feed everyone.
FACES OF FOOD SAFETY

Sheila McMillan

FSIS is Her Dream Job

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

In 1985, Sheila McMillan graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Science in Food Science and Human Nutrition. Two years later, working at varying jobs unrelated to her degree and enjoying her freedom from the rigors of higher education, McMillan’s parents, Nelson (a U.S. postal employee) and Angelee (a federal clerk typist), asked her about her plans for the future. Her mother recommended the younger McMillan give the civil service a try.

McMillan considered her options. She could pursue a lucrative career in the private industry, or she could work in the public sector as a federal employee and improve the lives of the American people. McMillan chose the latter. She saw a posting for a food technologist with FSIS’ Office of Field Operations (OFO). “After reading the job description, I knew FSIS was the career path for me. In short, I had found my dream job,” McMillan said. “The announcement had everything I was looking for in a job. Principally, I would be responsible for making sure that food is produced safely, legally, and is the quality the product claimed.”

Drawing on Experience

Three decades later, McMillan is still in OFO, but is now an enforcement, investigations and analysis officer (EIAO) in Oak Park, Michigan. As an EIAO, her duties involve a variety of in-plant tasks and verification functions, to include conducting food safety assessments (which determines the adequacy of the plants’ food safety systems) and confirming that the businesses can produce safe, wholesome products per regulatory requirements. She also reviews Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures to ensure establishments’ equipment is clean and safe to use for food production, and analyzes Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) plans. McMillan said these plans are “ground zero” in preventing, reducing and eliminating identified food safety hazards.

“My job is to make sure scientific, technical or regulatory documents support all decisions made within the food system and each plant must adhere to those requirements. That’s where HACCP plans come into play,” McMillan said. “Establishments can write beautiful plans, but if they fail to implement them properly, then the plans do not serve their purpose. I evaluate these plans to make sure they are sound and scientifically based; identify the establishments’ biological, chemical and physical hazards; and ensure that the plans are implemented successfully. These are critical steps in preventing foodborne illnesses and dangers.”

To do her job efficiently, McMillan draws from her well of experiences, her investigative abilities and her “sixth sense.”

“I have a tool bag full of farm-to-consumer knowledge that I draw from every day,” she said. “My investigative skills come in handy when I’m conducting recall effectiveness checks at stores and restaurants making sure that products associated with recalls have been removed from commerce. Those skills coupled with my intuition comes into play to spot red flags. For example, if an establishment is cooking a lot of product, and I know they do not have the freezer space for cooling it all, the hairs on the back of my neck start to stand up. I’ll check their records, and if they are pristine, showing that the product is cooling as it should be, I follow my instincts and take the time to do some investigating. More times than not, my instincts are right.”

Bridging the Gap

McMillan considers herself an ambassador for FSIS because she ensures consumers are safe from purchasing potentially hazardous or harmful products. She transfers information from the district office to establishments and back again. She also assists plant owners when issues arise.

“Often, problems are discovered during a food safety assessment,” McMillan said. “I’m there, along with the frontline supervisors, to talk the plant owner down from the proverbial ledge and to explain FSIS’ regulatory process. I feel that it’s my job to help them find solutions to their concerns, which could range...”

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Goal 2: Modernize Inspection Systems, Policies and the Use of Scientific Approaches

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

In the March issue of The Beacon, we looked at the first of the three goals from the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan. This month, we turn to Goal 2: Modernize Inspection Systems, Policies and the Use of Scientific Approaches. FSIS continues to be a leader in food safety by developing and implementing science-based ways to modernize its inspection system and to improve tools for Agency personnel.

FSIS is accomplishing this goal through two outcomes — Outcome 2.1: Improve Food Safety and Humane Handling Practices through Adoption of Innovative Approaches; and Outcome 2.2: Enhance Access to Complete and Accurate Information to Inform Decisions.

Outcome 2.1 focuses on identifying or developing innovative tools, techniques, and methodologies or approaches to support continued modernization. The Agency aims to reduce consumer risks by ensuring that FSIS uses the most current practices, technologies and science to inform regulatory requirements and inspection procedures to systematically control and prevent hazards associated with FSIS regulated products.

This Outcome includes modernization efforts, such as our recent publishing of the swine modernization proposed rule. It also includes a specific focus on restraint and stunning to improve compliance and reduce the risk of humane handling incidents. To support this effort, the Agency has ramped up efforts to enhance education and outreach strategies to target small and very small establishments to support them, and to ensure more consistent application of humane handling practices and compliance.

Outcome 2.2 focuses on improvements to systems, tools and communications that will enable FSIS employees and external stakeholders to more easily access and apply Agency information. Improvements in the content, format and delivery of information allow for more consistent implementation and better understanding of policy by both field employees and industry. These include improving data visualization capabilities, developing Inspection Program Personnel (IPP) job aids, redesigning web information on compliance guidelines to better assist IPP and industry, updating our guidance on allergens, posting of establishment data sets and other activities. This Outcome also supports Secretary Sonny Perdue’s OneUSDA priority of providing excellent customer service – both internally and externally to the Agency.

POLICY UPDATES

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

Notice 14-18, Eligibility of Foreign Countries to Export Siluriformes Fish and Fish Products to the United States


Notice 17-18, Delayed Implementation of Verification of Revised Appendix A and B

Notice 18-18, Follow-Up Sampling in Raw Poultry Establishments Not Meeting Salmonella Performance Standards

• Directive 5000.4 Rev. 2, Performing the Pre-Operational Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures Verification Task

• Directive 5000.5 Rev. 2, Verification of Less Than Daily Sanitation Procedures in Processing Operations

Administrative Issuances:

• Notice 16-18, Annual Notice to High-Mileage Drivers

• Notice 19-18, Training Requirement for International Travel

• Notice 20-18, 2018 Yearend Closing Instructions
SAFETY CORNER

Hearing Conservation Training

By Todd Nixon and Curtis Wallis, OM
Phone: (404) 562-5886 and (510) 769-5750, respectively

According to Directive 4791.1, Basic Occupational Safety and Health Program and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations in 29 CFR 1910.95(k) (1), FSIS must provide training about hearing conservation to all employees who are exposed to high levels of noise in the workplace. The training must be conducted when an employee is assigned to a duty station and annually, thereafter.

To ensure OSHA’s training requirements are met, the Environmental, Safety and Health Group (ESHG) developed training materials for supervisors to use. The training material consists of three PowerPoint presentations and is found on the ESHG intranet site at https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/centerContent/fsisPage.jsp?keyword=HearingConservationTraining9607.

Training topics include: the effects of noise on hearing; methods for monitoring noise levels; the purpose and procedures of audiometric testing; the purpose of hearing protectors; noise reduction of various types of hearing protectors; and the proper selection, fitting and use of protectors.

When possible, supervisors should demonstrate donning and doffing of the hearing protection as shown in the training material. It is important that employees understand the proper use, care and limitations of the hearing protection.

After the training presentation has been reviewed, supervisors can document training for employees in AgLearn using the attestation course, “FSIS – Annual Hearing Conservation Training Affirmation.”

For questions about annual training requirements for the Hearing Conservation Program, contact the Occupational Safety and Health specialist for your district. Contact information can be found on the public FSIS safety site at https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/informational/aboutfsis/audience-employees/employee-safety.

The FSIS FoodKeeper App

*Are these leftovers still good?*

There’s an app for that.

**FOODKEEPER**

- The FoodKeeper App helps users understand storage, and maximize the freshness and quality, of nearly 600 food and beverage items.
- Calendar integration allows users to set up reminders when products are nearing their recommended storage date.
- Includes cooking advice to help users prepare products in ways that eliminate foodborne bacteria.
- Users can get notification when FSIS or FDA announce food recalls daily, weekly, or based on their search history.
- Don’t see a product you’re looking for? Tell us about it with the app, and we’ll work on including it in future updates.

[More information and download links provided]
Impacting Food Safety through Rulemaking:
Swine Modernization Rule Still Open for Comment!

By Jeremy Emmert, OPACE
Phone: (202) 720-3988

In earlier Beacon articles and communications from FSIS leadership, we’ve shared that rulemaking is one way that employees can impact food safety. Consistent with FSIS core values, employees are empowered to participate in the rulemaking process that could potentially affect their daily duties and improve food safety.

Currently, FSIS’ proposed rule for the Modernization of Swine Slaughter Inspection is open for comment and is scheduled to close on May 2. At last count over 50,000 comments had been received! Anyone, including FSIS employees and the general public, may comment.

You can learn more about the proposed rule on the FSIS public website at https://bit.ly/2BlB6Bt. The scrolling banner has information about the proposed rule. Under the proposed rule, all establishments that slaughter swine would be required to implement measures to control enteric pathogens that can cause foodborne illness. Establishments would be required to have controls to prevent contamination throughout the entire production process in their Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point plans, Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures or other prerequisite programs. This includes a minimum frequency with which establishments would be required to collect pre-evisceration and post-chill samples.

Additionally, under the proposed rule, establishments that specifically slaughter market hogs will be able to voluntarily opt into the New Swine Inspection System. Under this optional system, establishments would be required to sort and remove unfit animals before FSIS ante-mortem inspection and trim and identify defects on carcasses and parts before FSIS post-mortem inspection. FSIS inspectors would still inspect each carcass to verify that plant sorters properly sorted carcasses, ensuring that only compliant products receive the USDA mark of inspection. Establishments would also be allowed to develop tailored sampling plans that are more effective in measuring process control.

Remember, the comment period closes May 2. Find the rule at www.regulations.gov and simply type “FSIS” into the search box. There will be a box you can click that says “Comment Now!” You may type your thoughts in the comment box and upload any files that support your comment (if you wish).

Reorganization of Civil Rights at USDA

By Amanda Krot, CRS
Phone: (301) 504-7747

On March 9, Secretary Perdue announced his intent to strengthen civil rights and customer service at USDA by reorganizing the civil rights offices at the agency and staff office levels. The reorganization is in accordance with Executive Order 13781, “Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch,” and strives to ensure consistency across USDA and eliminate inefficiencies in delivering civil rights services. The realignment will result in two major changes – reorganization of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) and consolidation of agencies’ civil rights offices at the Mission Area level.

Under the realignment, the OASCR will be led by the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) and an Associate ASCR. The reorganization will eliminate several positions and divisions within OASCR and reorganize the organization into two subgroups – Civil Rights Enforcement and Civil Rights Operations. OASCR will continue to serve as the head civil rights office at USDA and direct all Departmental civil rights activities including those of Mission Areas, Departmental Administration, staff offices, and the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

Agencies’ civil rights offices will be realigned as follows:
(1) Departmental Administration, staff offices, and Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs will share civil rights resources;
(2) OIG will have an independent Civil Rights Director; and
(3) each remaining Departmental Mission Area will consolidate its sub-agency resources at the Mission Area level. Since FSIS is the only Agency within the Food Safety Mission Area, FSIS anticipates little to no change to its Civil Rights Staff (CRS) and resources.

Employees wishing to initiate an Equal Employment Opportunity complaint should continue to contact CRS at 1-800-269-6912 or via email at AskCRD@fsis.usda.gov, within 45 days of the alleged discrimination. Questions regarding the reorganization or other civil rights matters should be directed to CRS.
Introducing the e-Device Pilot

By Arriell Garner, OFO, with Cassandra Daniels and Aaron Lee, AFGE Local 2325 Representatives
Phone: (301) 344-0734

FSIS continues to strive to improve connectivity for our field employees, in alignment with FSIS’ Strategic Goal 2.2: Enhance Access to Complete and Accurate Information to Inform Decisions. FSIS is helping more employees gain on-line access to FSIS-approved systems by increasing the availability of electronic devices. These devices will help ensure access to FSIS training materials, data reports, and other information on the FSIS Intranet.

On Feb. 8 and 9, FSIS kicked off an e-Device Pilot at Establishment (EST) M-18079 (Smithfield Fresh Meats Corp., Tar Heel, N.C.). On-line Food Inspectors participated in a two day training session and volunteered to participate in the six month e-Device pilot. Additional establishments may be scheduled to participate in the pilot. Employees at EST. 262, National Beef, Dodge City, Kan., received e-Device training on March 28 and 29.

During the next six months, on-line food inspectors will use these devices to access FSIS email, the FSIS public website, review Agency policies, electronically capture time and attendance via the Calendar Year 2018 3500 Series

Timesheets, prepare and submit travel reimbursement claims using the AD-616 form, access AgLearn and gain exposure to other work-related resources. Surveys will also be administered to pilot participants and supervisors to assess the effectiveness of the e-Device pilot.

(Left) The first team of inspection personnel from EST. M-18079 who participated in the e-Device pilot. Warren Shelton, Dean Bramell, Robyn Joynes, Paul Kiecker, Arriell Garner, Phillip Williams, Teresa Reaves, Lesley Capers, Roger Murphy, Philip Bronstein, James Harris, Ernestine Alexander, Steve Lalicker, Ennis Williams, Adonis Johnson and Dee Emanuel.


The following inspectors participated in the training but are not pictured: Wanda Brit, Delorise Butler, Ana Florenzano, Myoshia Graham, Tierra McKoy, Melvin Montgomery, Gary Parker, Tremeika Parker, Varonna Rich, James Sellers, Siesha Singletary, Carolyn Washington and Ricky Worley.

Continued on page 10...
At that second session, “Food Safety: Arming Consumers with the Right Knowledge and Tools,” Aaron Lavallee, FSIS Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education (OPACE), spoke of protecting consumers through outreach and state and county cooperative extension offices. Lavallee showed attendees how OPACE professionals seek to understand and change consumer behavior to improve food safety outcomes by reaching the public in a fast-moving and increasingly high-tech media landscape full of challenges such as misinformation, fragmentation and ever-shrinking attention spans.

Other speakers at the food safety sessions came from industry, non-governmental organizations and partner agencies such as APHIS, USDA’s National Institute for Food and Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services’ Food and Drug Administration.

One emphasis of their talks was on the role of scientific research to advance food safety. Another was collaboration — not only between agencies, but even with consumer and industry groups — working together to reform and improve laws and public health outcomes.


Chapman’s presentation, “Protecting Ourselves: What Do We Need to Know?” focused on how research and extension work together across the food chain to ensure food safety will be addressed. Teplitski’s presentation, “Protecting and Educating Consumers through New Innovative Technologies,” focused on how the USDA support innovations, technologies and protect and educate consumers on foodborne contaminants and disease.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 1</td>
<td>Pennsylvania firm recalls approximately 1,925 pounds of turkey sausage products due to misbranding and undeclared allergens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1</td>
<td>Texas firm recalls approximately 4,050 pounds of chicken sausage products due to misbranding and an undeclared allergen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2</td>
<td>Missouri firm recalls an undetermined amount of ready-to-eat meat products that were produced without the benefit of federal inspection. Additionally, the products contain known allergens, specifically wheat, eggs, soy and milk that are not declared on the finished product labels.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2</td>
<td>California firm recalls approximately 3,946 pounds of ready-to-eat meat products that may be adulterated with <em>Listeria monocytogenes</em>.</td>
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<td>March 3</td>
<td>Oregon firm recalls approximately 14,806 pounds of ground beef and pork products that may be contaminated with <em>E. coli</em> O157:H7.</td>
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<td>March 9</td>
<td>Mississippi firm recalls approximately 69,016 pounds of Siluriformes fish (catfish) products that may be adulterated with a residue of public health concern, specifically leucomalachite green.</td>
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<td>March 15</td>
<td>Wisconsin firm recalls approximately 109,603 pounds of smoked pork sausage products that may be contaminated with extraneous materials.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 15</td>
<td>Texas firm recalls up to 53,154 pounds of raw beef products that may be contaminated with <em>Salmonella</em>. The products incorporated a non-meat ingredient, Au Jus seasoning, that was found positive for the presence of <em>Salmonella</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>Illinois firm recalls approximately 484,800 pounds of beef products that may be contaminated with <em>Salmonella</em>. The raw beef products incorporated a non-meat ingredient, Au Jus seasoning, which tested positive for the presence of <em>Salmonella</em>.</td>
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<td>March 20</td>
<td>Louisiana firm recalls an undetermined amount of beef burrito products that were produced without the benefit of federal inspection.</td>
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<td>March 21</td>
<td>California firm recalls approximately 1,238 pounds of beef jerky products due to a processing deviation that may have led to under processing of products.</td>
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<td>March 28</td>
<td>Minnesota firm recalls approximately 96,384 pounds of chicken products that may be contaminated with extraneous materials.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 29</td>
<td>Minnesota firm recalls an undetermined amount of frozen ready-to-eat and not-ready-to-eat meat and poultry products due to temperature abuse during transport to a Single Store on Oahu, Honolulu, Hawaii, which may have resulted in the growth of spoilage organisms or pathogens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>Texas firm recalls approximately 7,146 pounds of raw beef products that were produced and packaged without the benefit of federal inspection.</td>
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For more information, go to [www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls).
from a labeling issue to finding the holes in their HACCP plans. I see us as partners, and without USDA, I wouldn’t have had this opportunity to make a difference.”

She also extends her ambassador duties to FSIS employees and credits the Agency’s i-Impact initiative for being the catalyst. “As an i-Impact trainer, I facilitate communication with in-plant personnel and let them know that what they do every day, whatever the function, does make a difference in the world of food safety,” McMillan said. “I’m just so glad I’ve had the opportunity to be a part of the program.”

Adventurer and Family Woman

McMillan is an avid traveler and hopes to one day visit Arizona, Colorado and Paris. She also enjoys spending time with family and hanging out with her mother, whom she affectionately calls her “shopping buddy.”