

FSIS New Employee Orientation

This module covers an overview of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Objectives

After completing this module, you will be able to:

1. Identify USDA's role in government.
2. Identify FSIS' role in USDA, and where we get our authority.
3. Describe FSIS' workforce and offices, and the roles of each

Resource Materials

USDA web homepage

FSIS web homepage

Introduction

American consumers spend about \$617 billion dollars annually on food. Of that amount, \$500 billion dollars are spent on foods produced here in the United States. U.S. meat and poultry exports are America's top agricultural export.

Meat and poultry product purchases in the United States make up a large portion of the monies spent on U.S. produced products. Those product purchases equate to Americans consuming 236 pounds of meat and poultry products per person each year. Not only do we have an enormous supply of product, but we have one of the safest supplies of meat, poultry, and egg products. How is this possible?

Behind safe product production is an army of public health professionals and support personnel. The safety of our products is largely a result of sustained regulatory surveillance, research, and the educational efforts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Some examples of these front-line and behind the scenes professionals are In-plant Inspection Teams, Veterinarians, Chemists, Microbiologist, Analysts and Statisticians, Secretaries and Specialist, Economists, Training Teams; and, the list goes on and on. To understand how the system works and how these individuals play a role in it, let's review the "BIG PICTURE".

The "Big Picture"

We begin our review with the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution prescribes the responsibilities of the government's three branches:

Legislative

Executive

Judicial

These three branches all have roles to ensure the safety of the U.S. food supply.

Congress, the Legislative Branch, enacts statutes or laws that are designed to ensure the safety of the food supply; and, establishes the nation's level of protection. The Executive Branch is responsible for the implementation of these laws. They do so by developing, and enforcing regulations. When enforcement actions, regulations, or policies lead to disputes, the Judicial Branch is charged to render impartial decisions on the development, implementation, and/or enforcement of those laws. Under which branch would you expect to find your role in the "BIG PICTURE"?

Food Safety and Inspection Service personnel find themselves in the same branch of government as the President of the United States, the Executive Branch. This branch, headed by the President, consists of the Vice President, department heads and the heads of independent agencies.

The Independent Agencies help carry out policy, or provide special services. Examples of these special services are environmental protection, federal banking, merit systems protection and personnel management to name but a few. The Department Heads, also known as the Cabinet, advise the President on any issues that relate to their respective offices. Within the Cabinet, we have 15 Executive Departments:

- Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
- Department of Education
- Department of Energy
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of the Interior
- Department of Justice
- Department of Labor
- Department of State
- Department of Transportation
- Department of the Treasury
- Department of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Agriculture is one of the largest and most diverse departments in the Federal Government.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Executives

Heading the Department of Agriculture is the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This position is an appointed position, and was created to ensure oversight of the entire Department. As head of a department of 113,000 employees, the Secretary oversees the nation's farm and food programs.

The current USDA Secretary of Agriculture is: _____.

The Deputy Secretary of Agriculture assists the Secretary of Agriculture by overseeing the day to day activities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and helps support the mission of USDA.

The current Deputy Secretary of Agriculture is: _____.

USDA'S Mission

USDA's mission statement reads:

"Provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management. "

That is, USDA provides leadership in agriculture issues. Those issues include the management of traditional farm programs, private lands conservation, domestic food assistance, agriculture research and education, agricultural marketing, international trade, meat and poultry inspection, forestry, rural development programs, and Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs.

The Department of Agriculture is divided into Eight Mission Areas which operate over 200 programs. These Areas include:

- Farm Production and Conservation
- Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services
- Food Safety
- Marketing and Regulatory Programs
- Natural Resources and Environment
- Research, Education and Economics
- Rural Development
- Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs

The Food Safety Mission Area ensures that the Nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry and egg products are safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. This Mission Area also plays a key role in the President's Council on Food Safety; and, has been instrumental in coordinating a National Food Safety Strategic Plan among various partner Agencies (the Department of Health and Human Services, the Environmental Protection Agency, and others).

An Under Secretary heads each mission area and oversees the policies and programs of the area. Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is in the Food Safety mission area. The Under Secretary for Food Safety also oversees the U.S. Codex Steering Committee, which provides guidance to U.S. Delegations to the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

The current Under Secretary for Food Safety is: _____.

Just as in the overall structure for USDA, the Under Secretary for Food Safety is assisted by the Deputy Under Secretary. The duties of this office include overseeing the policies and programs of FSIS as well as chairing the U.S. Codex Steering Committee.

The current Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety is: _____.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service

Under the Food Safety mission area is our agency, FSIS. FSIS administers the federal meat and poultry inspection program, and the egg products program; to assure safety, wholesomeness and truthful labeling of these products. This is done under the authority afforded to us under the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA), and the Egg Products Inspection Act (EPIA).

Our Agency sets standards for food safety and regulates all raw and processed meat, poultry, and egg products sold in interstate commerce, including imported products. We also enforce, and conduct food safety consumer education programs.

Although the Under Secretary and the Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety are responsible for overseeing the food safety policies and programs, the Administrator of the Food Safety and Inspection Service is responsible for the day-to-day food safety activity oversight. FSIS has embraced the vision of being “a trusted public health regulatory agency”, along with the goals which align us with the Food Safety Mission Area.

The Administrator of FSIS is responsible for managing FSIS’ food safety activities. In this role, the Administrator carries out the activities to support the Agency’s vision of being “a trusted public health regulatory agency”.

The current FSIS Administrator is: _____.

Assisting the Administrator is the Deputy Administrator. The Deputy Administrator directs the Agency’s strategies and initiatives for public affairs, media, congressional relations, consumer education and employee communications.

The current FSIS Deputy Administrator is: _____.

USDA Headquarters

USDA’s Headquarters complex buildings are located in Washington, D.C.; on the National Mall at 1400 Independence Avenue, SW. The Jamie L. Whitten Building houses about 1000 employees including the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary’s Chief of Staff, the Policy Staff, the Operations Staff, the Scheduling Staff and White House Liaison; and, the Under Secretaries and FSIS’ Administrator.

Across the street is the South Building which is a six-story, block-long masonry building. It became known as the USDA’s “South Building” as a result of sitting south of the Whitten Building. Until the Pentagon was built in 1942, the South Building was the world’s largest office building; it has 7 miles of corridors, 4292 offices, 4746 windows, and houses approximately 6500 employees. Within the South Building, we find the headquarters office of FSIS’ Offices and Program Areas. The South Building connects to the Whitten Building by an underground tunnel running under Independence Avenue and by two walkways formed over this same street.

Also, we have some of our headquarters personnel housed at the Aerospace Center, the George Washington Carver Center, and the Congressional Quarterly.

FSIS - A Public Health Regulatory Agency

The Food Safety and Inspection Service is a “trusted public health regulatory agency”. But, what is a public health agency?

Historically, public health focused on the absence of disease, disease prevention and control. For FSIS, public health is improving the health status of the citizens. This includes protecting, promoting and enhancing the health status of the American public. However, FSIS is also a regulatory agency. In what aspects are we a regulatory agency?

Earlier, we discussed the three branches of government. We said that the Legislative Branch, or Congress, enacts statutes or laws that are designed to ensure the safety of the food supply. In our earlier discussions, we also discussed the Acts that were enacted by the Legislative Branch:

FMIA – The Federal Meat Inspection Act
PPIA – The Poultry Products Inspection Act
EPIA – The Egg Products Inspection Act

As part of the Executive Branch, it is FSIS’ responsibility to implement these laws. We regulate meat, poultry and egg products. Thus, our role as a “regulatory agency” is to use the Acts to improve the health status of the American public.

As Public Health employees, we look at the entire meat, poultry, and egg products operation — the sanitation and so forth — not just specifically the regulatory component. In addition, through scientific and educational components, we reduce the level of pathogens and outbreaks of foodborne illness, and educate establishment officials, food handlers, and consumers. We ensure security of our food supply from biological, chemical, and physical contamination. There are many other activities we do that fall under the public health definition other than providing a safe product.

FSIS Vision

It is essential that everyone in FSIS, regardless of his or her role, recognize that we all play a part in achieving our common vision to be:

A trusted public health regulatory agency committed to preventing foodborne illness.

Achieving our vision must be carried out on two levels - collectively and individually. On a collective level, there are three basic functions which we apply in order to operate as a successful public health agency. The first function is assessment, which simply means we identify public health problems. The second function is policy development, where we determine what actions and resources are needed to solve the problems. And the third function is assurance, where we make sure the job gets done.

As individuals, employees may specialize in a particular function. For example, our field employees specialize in assuring the American public that the job gets done. Many of

the employees at Headquarters are responsible for identifying public health problems; and others, for using that information to develop policies. Thus, it is a multitude of individual efforts which each one of us employs every day that contribute to FSIS becoming “a trusted public health regulatory agency”.

FSIS: The Organization

Now that we’ve answered the “What is FSIS” question, let’s shift gears a little before we go into more detail explaining the “Who is FSIS”. As a part of our FSIS family, we want to make sure that you have what you need to make your new transition as easy as possible. Our standard is to provide you with quality services and benefits, which hopefully exceed your expectations.

FSIS Offices

The organizational structure of FSIS enables us to better execute our responsibilities as a World Class Public Health Regulatory Agency. We are a large agency with over 10,000 employees housed throughout the nation.

We will visit each of these units and see how we work together to accomplish our food safety activities.

Program Areas

- Office of the Administrator
- Office of Field Operations
- Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit
- Office of Public Health Science
- Office of Policy and Program Development
- Office of the Chief Financial Officer
- Office of International Coordination
- Office of Employee Experience and Development
- Office of the Chief Information Officer
- Office of Management (Human Resources)
- Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education
- Internal Affairs
- Office of Planning, Analysis and Risk Management
- Significant Incident Preparedness and Response Staff

Office of the Administrator

The Office of the Administrator (OA) oversees FSIS' major programs. The Office of the Administrator oversees the civil rights staff, the emergency Coordination function, and the food defense assessment function.

The Civil Rights Staff provides advice, guidance and assistance on the implementation, management, compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity programs, and manages the alternative dispute resolution, mediation EEO & non EEO. This office works to ensure fair and equal treatment to internal and external customers.

Office of Field Operations (OFO)

The Office of Field Operation (OFO) manages a program of regulatory oversight and inspection to assure that meat, poultry, and egg products are wholesome, safe, and properly packaged and labeled. OFO is the largest program area within the FSIS, managing about 85% of the Agency's resources and about 90% of its human resources. Field Operations employs about 7,200 field inspection personnel including Food Inspectors, Consumer Safety Inspectors, Public Health Veterinarians, Veterinary Medical Specialists, and Enforcement, Investigation and Analysis Officers. OFO manages inspection and enforcement activities regulated under the FMIA, PPIA, and EPIA in over 6,000 establishments throughout the United States, Guam, The Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands. The Office of Field Operation manages the international inspection functions and includes the Import Inspection Division. The inspection personnel are managed through a network of 10 district offices located throughout the United States and to whom about 150 field supervisors report. OFO oversees FSIS outreach function.

Field Operations manages a nationwide program of public health protection through inspection and verification of HACCP systems. This Office is also responsible for enforcing the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act for livestock. It also verifies that other consumer protection requirements (OCP) are met at all federally inspected establishments. OFO staff collects samples during food processing to ensure control of microbiological, physical and chemical hazards; and as needed, verify that establishments appropriately conduct recall procedures. Some specific inspection activities that inspection personnel perform is antemortem inspection on the live animals brought to the establishment including livestock (cattle, swine, sheep, goat, and equine) and poultry. Each animal also receives postmortem inspection (carcass and parts of carcasses) after they are slaughtered. Regulatory and enforcement activities continue throughout the processing, packaging, and labeling of numerous meat and poultry products such as sausages, bacon, hotdogs, hams, meat pies, egg rolls, chicken tenders, turkey rolls, and many others.

Under the Food Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (also know as the 2008 Farm Bill), FSIS was mandated to inspect catfish. Catfish inspection program manage a nationwide program of regulatory oversight to ensure the safety, security and wholesomeness of domestic and imported catfish. Some of their responsibilities include planning and formulating domestic and international catfish policies, establishing Agency policies and procedures for conducting catfish equivalence evaluations and foreign catfish inspection system audits, conducting audits of foreign country catfish inspection systems, and conducting regulatory compliance activities pertinent to federally inspected establishments and ports of entry. However, the primary function of OFO is within the assurance component of the Public Health Model (assessment, policy development, assurance), and maintain computerized inspection databases on the food safety, food security, and consumer protection programs.

Office of Planning, Analysis and Risk Management (OPARM)

On August 11, 2002, FSIS created the Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness (OFSEP). The primary function of this office was to coordinate an Agency response to terrorist threats or deliberate acts of terrorism affecting the supply of meat, poultry, and egg products.

Administrative Overview: FSIS New Employee Orientation 11-21-2018

In June 2005, the name of this program area was changed to the Office of Data Integration and Food Protection (ODIFP) which better communicates the comprehensive nature of the program area's mission. In 2018 the name of this program area was changed to Office of Planning, Analysis and Risk Management (OPARM)

Quite often, the terms food safety is confused with food security. Although both are necessary for public health, they require different expertise and experiences along with varying management and prevention methods. These terms are defined as follows:

- **Food safety** involves preventing the accidental or unintentional contamination of food during processing, production, operational deficits, or improper handling.
- **Food security**, on the other hand, focuses on the prevention of acts of deliberately and intentionally introducing dangerous substances into food.

Some of OPARM's activities and functions are:

- Data integration and analysis and predictive analytics activities
- Management control function
- Strategic planning and evaluation function

Office of Investigation, Enforcement and Audit (OIEA)

OIEA supports the Agency's mission and function through investigation, review, assessment, enforcement and audit capacity to improve management effectiveness, efficiency and decision making. It is through this proactive structure that OIEA alerts the Under Secretary and Administrator of any potential or harmful compromise, or failure, of FSIS programs or operations. In many ways, OIEA serves as the ears and eyes of the Agency.

OIEA activities extend to all areas ranging from field inspection effectiveness and efficiency to food safety policy; involving all matters, ranging from Import surveillance, fiscal accountability, human resource policy, hearing, appeals and to all domestic and international inspection function For example:

- Ensures that reviews of establishments for compliance and food safety investigations are carried out in a way most conducive to protecting the public health;
- Is the Agency's liaison with the Office of Inspector General and the General Accountability Office. This uniquely positions OIEA to focus on key areas in need of improvement.

Hearings and appeals

Detain product in commerce and requests that a seizure action be filed against such product.

The work of the field Program Investigators in OIEA places them on a daily basis in close proximity to performance and compliance problems and concerns at the in-plant level, which affords the agency the ability to deal with necessary adjustments and problems in a much more immediate and direct fashion than in the past.

OIEA also provides oversight of Federal/State cooperative agreements. Establishments have the option to apply for Federal or State Inspection. Although most of the Nation's meat and poultry is produced under Federal Inspection, there are about 28 states that have established meat and poultry inspection programs for products produce and sold within their jurisdictions. These states must enforce requirements at least equivalent to those of FSIS Federal inspection and operate under a cooperative agreement with FSIS. The Agency provides up to 50% of the State's operating funds, as well as training and other assistance. Additionally, OIEA provides oversight for the Interstate Shipment Cooperative Agreement, whereby some State-inspected facilities can produce and ship products across state lines.

Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education (OPACE)

OPACE plays a critical role in promoting the Agency's public health mission by conveying a single, unified and consistent message to diverse external audiences, and to all FSIS employees. They are also responsible for conducting public communication programs to inform and educate a variety of audiences about Food Safety and Inspection Service activities, food safety policies, foodborne illness, and safe food handling. These audiences include Congress, Media, Industry, Government, Academia and Consumers.

While the Executive Correspondence and Issues Management Staff prepare the Agency's written responses to food safety correspondence, the Congressional and Public Affairs Office also has a Congressional liaison staff within OPACE. They also are the liaison to the media and other constituents.

OPACE's Food Safety and Education Staff conduct communication activities. These are carried out through a variety of means such as public meetings, the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, print and video news releases, media tours, visits to members of Congress and their staffs, speeches, testimony, correspondence, publications, internal memoranda, internal and external news-letters, the FSIS website, and responses to Freedom of Information Act request. OPACE is responsible about the record management function in FSIS.

The Agency's consumer and food handler food safety education campaigns and programs are also handled by OPACE.

Office of Public Health and Science (OPHS)

OPHS provides leadership to FSIS and USDA, and assures the establishment and support of scientifically sound food safety programs and policies to reduce or eliminate foodborne illness.

The OPHS staff (Biologists, Chemists, Computer Specialists, Engineers, Epidemiologists, Food Technologists, Microbiologists, Nurses, Physicians, Public Health Specialists, Risk Analysts, Statisticians, Toxicologists, Veterinary Medical Officers, Veterinary Pathologists and other professionals) develop scientific and public health information related to meat, poultry, and egg products from their conception to consumption; and, uses that information to assess potential human health risks throughout the farm-to-table continuum. This includes the development of scientifically based risk assessments that evaluate the occurrence of foodborne contaminants and the probability of human illness upon exposure to such contaminants. In addition, OPHS scientific experts monitor and analyze production processes, identify and evaluate potential foodborne hazards. They also conduct trace-back or trace-forward investigations to identify product disposition and/or the origin of hazards, as well as participate in the recall of adulterated products.

OPHS operates three FSIS Field Service Laboratories (Eastern Laboratory, Midwestern Laboratory and Western Laboratory) that provide support in the areas of microbiology, pathology, food chemistry, species identification, entomology, extraneous materials, and other scientific disciplines. This Office also manages the Accredited Laboratory Program, which grants accreditation to non-federal analytical chemistry laboratories for food chemistry, and several classes of chemical and drug residue. Another component is the Food Emergency Response Network Division (FERN), housed within the Eastern Laboratory. FERN's role is to assist in the development and oversight of an integrated network of laboratories that can quickly respond to food-related emergencies. Through laboratory results, and other function work within OPHS, Agency initiated regulatory issues and policies (e.g. performance standards) have sound science based support.

Office of Management (OM)

The Office of Management (OM) is a support organization made up of a diverse group of over 400 employees who work in Washington, D.C. and Beltsville, MD. In addition to the offices in DC, there are also field offices, including the Human Resource Field Office in Minneapolis, MN. They serve in a variety of administrative, technical, professional occupations. These folks provide a full range of centralized administrative and support services; in addition to assisting in the day-to-day management of FSIS. FSIS personnel cannot do their jobs without the people in OM.

OM provides a full range of administrative and support services to FSIS including:

- Business systems improvement;
- Personal and real property;
- Health and safety;
- Labor and employee relations;

Contracting;
Procurement;
Workforce violence prevention; and
Management improvement and internal controls.

At FSIS, our Human Resources Division (HRD) within the Office of Management, supports and enhances the Agency's food safety mission by providing our employees with human resource services that are customer focused and timely. HRD provides services in the areas of:

Employee benefits and workers compensation
Position classification and position management
Personnel processing

Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD)

The Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD) is responsible for developing and recommending all domestic and international agency policy for the Food Safety and Inspection Service. This includes:

Gathering information and conducting analyses necessary to set policy for domestic inspection, export, and equivalency function.
Developing regulations,
Establishing new programs and systems,
Establish general labeling, food additives, labeling and product composition aspects,
Modifying existing standards and programs, and
Providing technical support.
Managing small plant help desk.

OPPD collaborates with other offices within FSIS to ensure statutory mandates are met. They also work closely with the Office of Field Operations in developing procedures and methods for conducting inspections of livestock, poultry, processed products, and egg products. It also establishes and modifies product standards, inspection systems methodologies, and enforcement strategies.

OPPD reviews new technologies that companies employ to ensure that their use is consistent with Agency regulations and will not adversely affect product safety, inspection procedures, or the safety of FSIS inspectors. It also serves as the Agency's center for technical assistance, advice, and guidance for OFO personnel and the industry. This includes technical guidance and assistance in the implementation of national policies, programs, systems, and procedures.

Office of Employee Experience and Development (OOEED)

This program area ensures that all FSIS personnel have the necessary training to effectively carry out their assigned duties. OOEED has three branches; the Center for Learning branch, Training Transformation and Distance Learning Staff, and The Employee Engagement and Recognition Staff

OOEED provides leadership in implementing training and development policies by assessing, planning, developing, and conducting various technical and non- technical programs, activities, and resources for the Agency's workforce.

Summary

So, now you have a closer look at Food Safety and Inspection Service and our many food safety activities.

We started with about 10,358 employees. That number has increased. You have joined us, and together we can accomplish our mission. As we conclude this part of your orientation, let's work daily toward supporting our mission:

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is the public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture responsible for ensuring that the nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.