

**Updates to Random and Risk-based Scheduling Criteria  
For the Ready-to-Eat (RTE) Product Routine Sampling Program  
(RTEPROD\_RAND and RTEPROD\_RISK Sampling Projects)**

Starting with samples scheduled for October, 2016 collection (around September 30, 2016), the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) will implement revised scheduling criteria for the RTEPROD Sampling Programs (RTEPROD\_RISK and RTEPROD\_RAND).<sup>1</sup> Under these programs, ready-to-eat (RTE) products are analyzed for *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Lm*) and *Salmonella*.

FSIS is making changes to the scheduling criteria that are used to assign sampling tasks at establishments based on a review of the existing sampling algorithm for both RTEPROD projects. In addition, FSIS conducted an analysis to identify the product groups most likely to be associated with *Listeria monocytogenes* positives and observed trends in *Listeria monocytogenes* positives in product groups not traditionally associated with the pathogen, possibly due to less effective controls. For example, an analysis of RTEPROD data from 2010-2013 showed acidified/fermented meat and poultry products have a higher percent positive for *Listeria monocytogenes* than hot dogs (0.46% vs. 0.37% respectively). Based on these analyses, FSIS has identified improvements to the sampling algorithm that could increase the Agency's likelihood of detecting positives. These improvements are in line with the [FSIS Risk Assessment for Risk-Based Verification Sampling of \*Listeria monocytogenes\*](#) (2010), and include updating the method used to assign sampling tasks each month, as well as updating several weighting factors used for RTEPROD\_RISK such as the weighting factor used for product group.

FSIS uses a statistical algorithm to assign RTEPROD sampling tasks at establishments that produce RTE products. Typically, tasks are assigned on or around the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month and are to be completed the following month. Either the random sampling project (RTEPROD\_RAND), or the risk-based sampling project (RTEPROD\_RISK), will assign a sampling task to an eligible establishment. There is a limit of 1 RTEPROD sample (either RAND or RISK) per establishment per month. The type of project (random or risk-based) refers to how establishments are selected by the statistical algorithm. It also refers to how inspection program personnel (IPP) are directed to select the RTE product sample to be collected at the establishment. Instructions for the selection of samples by IPP are in [FSIS Directive 10,240.4 Verification Activities for the \*Listeria monocytogenes\* \(\*Lm\*\) Regulation and the Ready-to-Eat \(RTE\) Sampling Program](#). No changes are being made to the instructions for FSIS personnel for collecting RTEPROD samples in FSIS Directive 10,240.4.

FSIS intends to allocate sampling resources evenly between the two RTEPROD sampling projects to ensure broad sampling coverage of all RTE products.<sup>1</sup> The following criteria will be used to select an eligible establishment for an RTE product sampling task (random or risk-based).

1. Each eligible RTE establishment will be selected for a random sample at least once every 6 months.
2. Any eligible establishment with a positive result (either *Salmonella* or *Lm*) in an RTEPROD sampling project (either random or risk-based) in the last 6 months is guaranteed to be selected for a random sampling task. In other words, after a positive occurs for an RTEPROD sample, that establishment will be selected for a RTEPROD\_RAND sampling task for each of the following 6 months.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, this is approximately 700 samples each month for each project.

3. The remaining number of random sampling tasks each month will be randomly assigned to eligible establishments not already selected under criteria 1 or 2.

4. Establishments that have at least one post-lethality exposed product in their plant profile and do not already have a random sampling task assigned will be assigned a risk ranking. Establishment selection for risk-based sampling tasks will be based on this risk ranking.<sup>2</sup> The risk ranking takes into account:

- a. The historical percent positive for each product<sup>3</sup> produced at the establishment.
- b. The daily production volume of each product at the establishment.
- c. The *Listeria* alternative<sup>3</sup> used for each product at the establishment.

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<sup>i</sup> Descriptions of both sampling projects can be found at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/data-collection-and-reports/microbiology/testing-program-for-rte-meat-and-poultry-products>

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<sup>2</sup> Establishments that do not produce any post-lethality exposed products are not eligible for the risk-based sampling project (RTEPROD\_RISK).

<sup>3</sup> This is based on the last five years of samples for a product, nationwide.

<sup>3</sup> The method used by the establishment to control *Listeria*.