



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

**Food Safety
and Inspection
Service**

**FSIS Directive
1240.1**

Revision 5

Communicating With External Entities

COMMUNICATING WITH EXTERNAL ENTITIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE—BASIC PROVISIONS

	Title	Page No.
I.	PURPOSE	1
II.	CANCELLATION	1
III.	REASON FOR REISSUANCE	1
IV.	REFERENCES	1
V.	ABBREVIATIONS	2
VI.	DEFINITION	2
VII.	GENERAL.	2

**PART TWO—COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS,
THEIR STAFFS, AND THE MEDIA**

I.	CORRESPONDENCE	3
	A. ECIMS	3
	B. CPAO	3
	C. Inquiries	3
II.	TELEPHONE CALLS.	4
III.	MEETINGS, BRIEFINGS OR INTERVIEWS, AND CONFERENCES	5
IV.	SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH.	5
V.	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	6

**PART THREE—COMMUNICATING WITH OUTSIDE ENTITIES OTHER
THAN THE MEDIA AND CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES**

	Title	Page No.
I.	APPLICABILITY.	7
II.	AUTHORIZING OFFICIALS	7
III.	AUTHORIZATION	7
IV.	GUIDANCE	8
	ATTACHMENT 3-1, QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.	9

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, DC

FSIS DIRECTIVE

1240.1
REVISION 5

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COMMUNICATING WITH EXTERNAL ENTITIES

PART ONE—BASIC PROVISIONS

I. PURPOSE

This directive describes provisions for employees to communicate with:

A. Elected officials, their staffs, and the media. **NOTE:** Only Executive Correspondence and Issues Management Staff (ECIMS) and Congressional and Public Affairs Office (CPAO) staffs are authorized to communicate with elected officials, their staffs, and the media. (See Part Two.)

B. Outside entities, other than the media and congressional offices. (See Part Three.)

II. CANCELLATION

This directive cancels FSIS Directive 1240.1, Revision 4, dated 9/27/01.

III. REASON FOR REISSUANCE

This directive is completely revised to include guidelines for communicating with entities outside of Congressional offices and to update organizational references.

IV. REFERENCES

FSIS Directive 1050.1, Requesting Participation at Meetings and Events Outside of Washington, DC

FSIS Directive 4735.3, Employee Responsibilities and Conduct

FSIS Directive 4735.6, Safeguarding Confidential Industry Information

Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989

DISTRIBUTION:
Electronic

OPI:
OPACE – Congressional and Public Affairs Office
OPACE – Executive Correspondence and Issues Management Staff

V. ABBREVIATIONS

The following appear in their shortened form in this directive:

CCO	Correspondence Control Officer, ECIMS
CPAO	Congressional and Public Affairs Office, OPACE
ECIMS	Executive Correspondence and Issues Management Staff, OPACE
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FSES	Food Safety Education Staff, OPACE
OPACE	Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education

VI. DEFINITION

Official Representative. An Agency employee authorized to present the official FSIS position on any topic to persons not employed by the Agency. This can occur during speeches, presentations, interviews, conversations, email, or in writing.

VII. GENERAL

A. FSIS is dedicated to maintaining confidence and trust in our Agency's food safety mission by:

1. Assuring that information released to outside entities meets guidelines for release, accurately reflects official Agency policy, and is furnished in an appropriate manner.

2. Minimizing any potential misunderstandings and unwarranted Agency and employee liabilities resulting from inappropriate release of information related to FSIS activities or goals.

B. As a private citizen, an employee may express views about Agency policy and programs, provided that the employee informs the audience that they are not speaking on behalf of FSIS or USDA, but as a private citizen on personal time.

**PART TWO—COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS,
THEIR STAFFS, AND THE MEDIA**

I. CORRESPONDENCE

FSIS receives inquiries from Members of Congress, State Governors, State legislature members and their staff members, media officials, constituents, consumer, and industry representatives regarding food safety issues and FSIS policies. FSIS has centralized offices that are responsible for responding to FSIS-related inquiries. These centralized offices ensure all information released is consistent with FSIS and USDA policy.

A. ECIMS.

1. Handles official Agency correspondence.
2. Responds to all incoming congressional letters (except those relating to hearings) and FOIA requests.
3. Works with Agency personnel to ensure the appropriate information is included with the Agency's responses to incoming correspondence.
4. Prepares correspondence for signature by the appropriate FSIS or USDA official and clears congressional responses through CPAO.

B. CPAO.

1. Responds to all congressional letters that relate to congressional hearings.
2. Responds to inquiries from constituents, consumer, and industry representatives regarding food safety issues and FSIS policies received through the FSIS Web site, emails, and letters.
3. Clears responses to all congressional correspondence.

C. Inquiries.

1. Refer written inquiries for information or meetings to ECIMS. Transmit all incoming correspondence by fax to the FSIS CCO. Mail the original incoming correspondence to the CCO with a notation of the date of the fax transmission. The address, telephone, and fax numbers for the CCO are:

USDA FSIS ECIMS
ROOM 1165 SOUTH BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20250
Telephone Number: 202-690-3882
Fax Number: 202-205-0158

2. Send written requests for documents or records to ECIMS, FOIA staff. The address, telephone and fax numbers, and email address are:

USDA FSIS ECIMS
ROOM 1144 SOUTH BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20250
Telephone Number: 202-690-3882
Fax Number: 202-720-7609
FSIS.FOIA@USDA.GOV

3. Refer other written inquiries for information or requests for interviews from the media to CPAO. The address, telephone and fax numbers are:

USDA FSIS CPAO
ROOM 1175 SOUTH BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20250
Telephone Number: 202-720-9113
Fax Number: 202-720-5704

II. TELEPHONE CALLS

A. CPAO responds to all telephone inquiries from elected officials and their staffs, and coordinates with the Agency representative on information available for public release. Refer telephone inquiries from elected officials and their staff members to CPAO.

1. CPAO's congressional staff coordinates the Agency's official responses to all questions from elected officials and their staffs.

2. CPAO's media staff:

a. Responds to and coordinates the Agency's official responses to questions from reporters.

b. Coordinates all interviews with reporters.

c. Determines the focus of the news stories and, as appropriate, relays information or grants interviews to the reporters.

d. Determines the Agency representative that the reporters should speak with.

3. CPAO's constituent staff responds to and coordinates the Agency's official responses to questions from constituents, consumer advocacy groups, and industry representatives.

B. ECIMS responds to telephone inquiries relating to FOIA requests.

C. FSES responds to constituent calls on the Meat and Poultry Hotline pertaining to safe food storage, handling, preparation, product dating, and labeling. This includes requests for consumer education materials from consumers, educators, and organizations.

III. **MEETINGS, BRIEFINGS OR INTERVIEWS, AND CONFERENCES**

A. CPAO coordinates:

1. All briefings, meetings, and plant tours with Members of Congress and their staff members. CPAO is aware of congressional concerns and determines the appropriate Agency official(s) to conduct briefings, meetings, and plant tours.

2. Briefings or interviews with reporters and determines:

a. The focus of the news story and, if appropriate, grants the briefing or interview to the reporter.

b. The Agency representative to speak to the reporter.

3. With the Agency representative on applicable information for public release.

4. Monthly meetings for consumer advocacy groups and industry representatives regarding new FSIS policies. When necessary, CPAO organizes public meetings to get feedback on new FSIS policies from consumer advocacy groups, industry representatives, and the general public.

B. FSES educates the general public on safe food handling and organizes a biannual food safety education conference.

IV. **SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH**

A. CPAO coordinates social media campaigns to reach consumers and other stakeholders using new digital technologies (**examples:** Twitter, blogs, social networks, and audio and video sharing platforms). Content sharing includes FSES educational materials, press releases, and other public documents.

B. OPACE employees must clear agency messages through FSIS social media outlets.

C. As a private citizen, employees may express views about Agency policy and programs, provided that the employee informs the audiences that they are not speaking on behalf of FSIS or USDA, but as a private citizen on personal time.

V. **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For further assistance, contact:

A. CPAO at 202-720-9113.

B. FSES at 301-344-5747.

PART THREE—COMMUNICATING WITH OUTSIDE ENTITIES OTHER THAN THE MEDIA AND CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES

I. APPLICABILITY

This part does not apply to Agency employees requesting participation at meetings and events (**examples:** conventions, workshops, and fairs). Agency employees requesting participation at meetings and events sponsored by outside entities, other than the media and congressional offices, must refer to FSIS Directive 1050.1 for procedures.

II. AUTHORIZING OFFICIALS

The Assistant Administrators or Deputy Assistant Administrators authorize employees in their program area to communicate on behalf of the Agency to outside entities, other than the media and congressional offices. This authority to approve requests may be re-delegated to the division director, staff director, or district manager levels.

III. AUTHORIZATION

A. Employees must obtain authorization before they can:

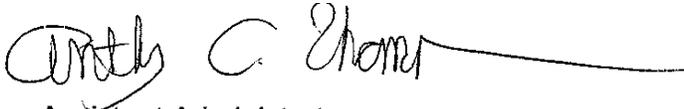
1. Officially communicate on behalf of the Agency, when this action is not an assigned duty stated in the employee's position description.
2. Provide or discuss official Agency documents, internal documents, or industry documents that are deemed releasable (**examples:** commercial or financial information on plants, pre-decisional documents, investigative reports, and records protected under the Privacy Act, such as personnel and medical files).

B. Employees are **not required to obtain authorization to:**

1. Communicate as Agency representatives if their official position descriptions include authorizations. (**EXAMPLE:** The employee's position description states that official representation to outside entities is a required duty and responsibility.)
2. Discuss information from publicly available Agency materials (**examples:** brochures, backgrounders, key facts, materials published on the FSIS Web site, materials already published in the Federal Register, Agency directives, and materials already made available at public meetings).

IV. **GUIDANCE**

Attachment 3-1 provides questions and answers to help employees recognize when and how they may represent FSIS in an official capacity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony C. Zhang", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Assistant Administrator
Office of Management

Attachment
3-1 Questions and Answers

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

This attachment provides questions and answers to help employees recognize when and how they may represent FSIS in an official capacity.

Q1. As part of an official assignment, I have researched a matter of interest to the Agency and have provided recommendations for decisions to senior managers. May I give information on the probable decision making to my professional colleague in the collegiate community?

A1. No, information should not be provided before decisions or rulemaking.

Q2. May I speak to my son's Boy Scout troop about my role with the FSIS?

A2. Yes, but advise your supervisor of your plans and make certain you are giving up-to-date information. FSES can provide information for handouts.

Q3. In the effort to be helpful, can I discuss a similar problem encountered by Plant A with Plant B?

A3. No, the details of one plant's activities should not be shared with another plant. Information about a plant's activities is considered proprietary.

Q4. I have been authorized by the Agency to make a presentation to an industry group. In the question and answer session that follows, a question is asked about a topic of great interest to the Agency, but one that does not pertain to my presentation. How do I handle this?

A4. Confine your answers to questions pertaining to the topic of your presentation. Give your questioner the name of an Agency person who could respond to the question, or promise to get them the name of someone who can respond. Be sure to follow through.

Q5. I receive a telephone call from a congressional office requesting information regarding a certain matter. What should I do?

A5. Advise the congressional office that someone will get back to them, and relay the information to CPAO for further contact. You can also provide the congressional office with CPAO's contact information.

Q6. I have been contacted by a television station asking me to appear on a local talk show. May I accept the invitation?

A6. Advise them that someone will get back to them, notify your supervisor, and refer the matter to CPAO.

Q7. Are there ways that I can express my concern about possible illegal practices that have come to my attention?

A7. Yes, employees are encouraged to inform their supervisor of such concerns. In addition, under the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989, a Federal employee may also file a Whistleblower complaint at any time the employee believes they have evidence of illegal or wasteful practices, or violations of the conduct regulations. An employee can report violations by calling the OIG hotline at 800-424-9121.

Q8. A reporter pulls me aside to discuss my presentation at a public meeting. What should I do?

A8. Discuss only publicly available information. If you are not sure if the information is public, or unsure of the answer, do not speculate. Advise the reporter that you will look into the request, and contact CPAO. Inform the CPAO press officer of the communication and request assistance on any area that you are unsure about.

Q9. A reporter stops by my office to discuss a project that I am working on. What should I do?

A9. Tell the reporter to contact CPAO.