FSIS DIRECTIVE	5620.1 Rev.1	7/22/14

USING askFSIS

I. PURPOSE

A. This directive provides instruction to inspection program personnel (IPP) regarding how to use askFSIS (the application) to open an askFSIS account, manage the account, and view commonly asked questions and answers developed and cleared by the Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD). In addition, this directive provides instruction to IPP regarding how to submit their own questions into the application in order to obtain a response from one of the OPPD staffs. The OPPD staffs that respond to questions submitted through the application include the International Relations and Strategic Planning Staff (IRSPS); Import/Export Coordination and Policy Development Staff (IECPDS); Risk, Innovations and Management Staff (RIMS); Labeling and Program Delivery Staff (LPDS); and the Policy Development Staff (PDS). The application is accessible from any computer with Internet access and has the capacity to maintain a list of each IPP's questions in his or her account.

B. FSIS is reissuing this directive to provide updated instructions for using the application and in response to input from IPP. As part of the USDA Cultural Transformation efforts, surveys of IPP usage and experience were conducted. The purpose of the surveys was to give IPP the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences using askFSIS. The results were used to target specific needs of current and potential users of the application, to develop guidance materials designed to increase IPP use of askFSIS, and to enable all IPP to have a more productive experience whenever they access askFSIS to search for answers to their policy questions.

C. The revision of this directive addresses the concerns provided through the surveys so that IPP will be better able to use the application in order to set up accounts, search publicly viewed posted Q&As and more effectively submit clear, concise questions.

KEY POINTS:

- *Provides guidance for searching askFSIS Q&As that are posted for public viewing on the internet*

- *Provides guidance to IPP related to accessing askFSIS, setting up an account, submitting questions, resetting passwords and IPP names, and managing accounts*

- *Identifies timeframes under which IPP can expect a response from OPPD staffs*

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic | **OPI:** OPPD

- *Provides information regarding the effective use of the 'Product' and 'Category' tabs*

II. CANCELLATION

FSIS Directive 5620.1, Using askFSIS, dated 01/11/10

III. BACKGROUND

A. On August 16, 2007, FSIS launched askFSIS, a Web-based computer application, designed to help OPPD more effectively respond to technical and policy-related questions from IPP, industry, consumers, other stakeholders, and the public.

B. AskFSIS is an application that is separate and distinct from Ask Inside FSIS, Ask Karen, and Ask the Expert. It is an interactive application that provides in-depth answers to inspection policy and technical questions. The application provides IPP with a timely way to raise and obtain definitive information about discrete concerns that they have about a notice or directive, regulatory documents, and policies. The concerns raised by IPP in their questions provide data that the Agency can use to help identify the Agency's policy development needs and evaluate policy effectiveness with regard to inspection-related issues.

C. The application also contains a searchable knowledge base of Q&As that allows visitors to seek answers to questions about such diverse topics as exporting, importing, labeling, sampling, FSIS policies, programs, and inspection procedures. In addition, upon request, the application notifies IPP when responses to previously posted Q&As have been updated.

D. The Q&As posted for public viewing on the application have been developed based on an analysis of the questions received from askFSIS IPP. Each Q&A posted for public viewing has gone through a clearance process that includes OPPD and other Agency Offices as appropriate. Questions submitted individually by IPP are not posted for public viewing on the web-based application. The questions are routinely evaluated in order to determine whether there is need to develop and clear a new Q&A for posting. FSIS often incorporates information from publically posted Q&As into directives or notices that provide necessary instructions to IPP.

NOTE: The information provided in the Q&As posted for public viewing on the internet are statements of official Agency policy.

IV.   APPLICATION LOGIN

A. The askFSIS Web page (http://askfsis.custhelp.com) is available through the "Start"' button on FSIS computers (Start/FSIS Applications/Internet-Intranet/askFSIS.

B. After accessing the askFSIS Web page, IPP who already have an askFSIS account are to click on "Log In" in the upper right hand corner of the screen to open the application.
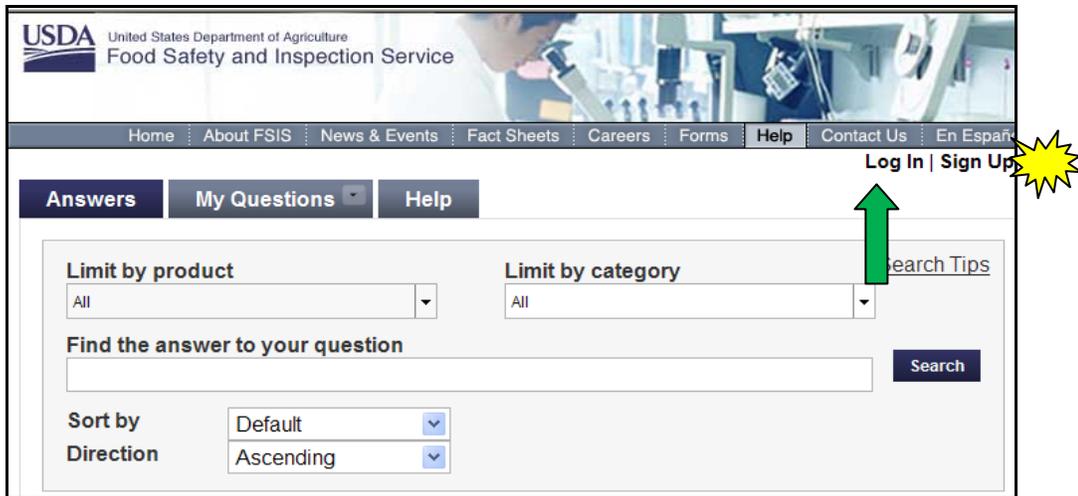
C. In the pop up window that opens, the IPP has to enter their username and password and then click "Log In."

Note: Usernames and passwords are case sensitive
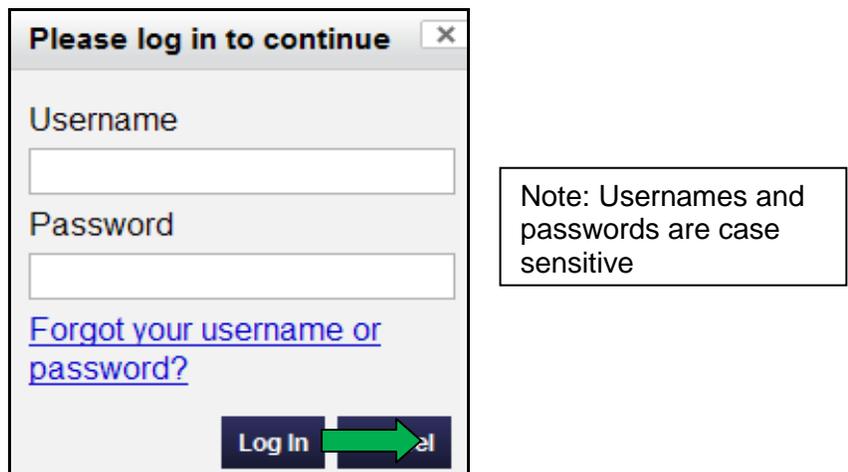
D. IPP who do not have an askFSIS account can click the "Sign Up" link in the upper right hand corner of the screen and then complete the required information on the "Create an Account" page. For additional information, see Section V below.

NOTE: IPP can view the Q&As posted for the public but cannot submit questions into askFSIS without setting up an account.

V. CREATE AN ACCOUNT

A. New IPP that want to submit a question must first create an account with a IPP username and password. To begin, IPP are to select "Sign Up" in the upper right-hand side of the screen
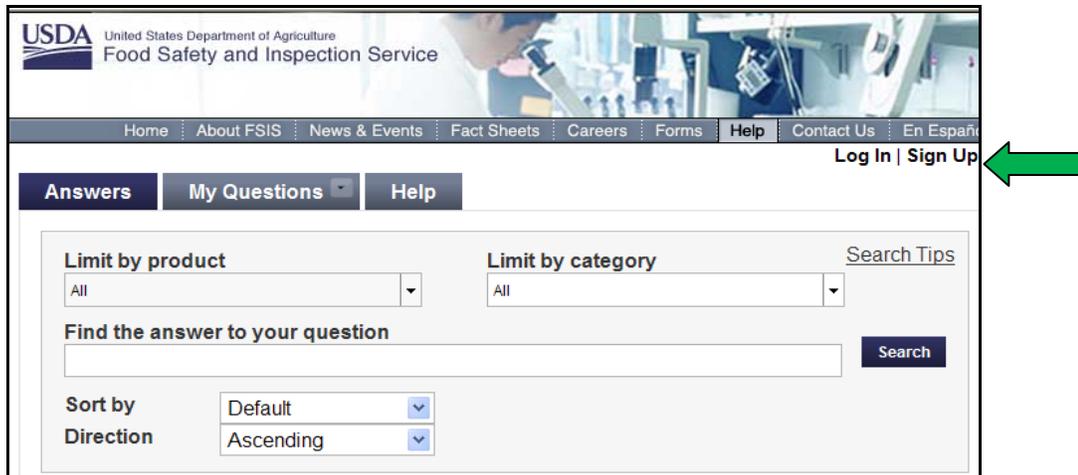
B. IPP must fill-in the requested information, including selecting a username and password of their choice. They are to then click on "Create Account" and follow any on-screen prompts.
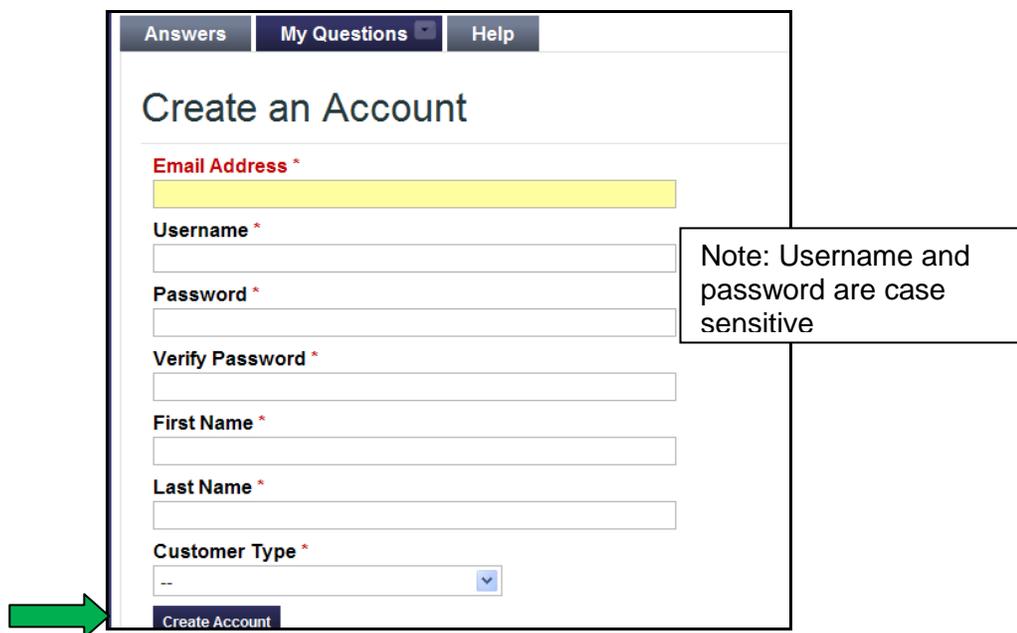
NOTE: There are no extra security requirements for askFSIS passwords. However, both the username and password are case sensitive. IPP will need to type their username correctly whenever logging in to the application. FSIS employees using their government issued computers to receive e-mail must use the correct e-mail format (first name.last name@fsis.usda.gov) when creating an account otherwise responses from OPPD staff cannot be delivered.

C. After creating an account, the IPP can submit questions and obtain answers that are not found in the public knowledge base following the directions in Section VI below.
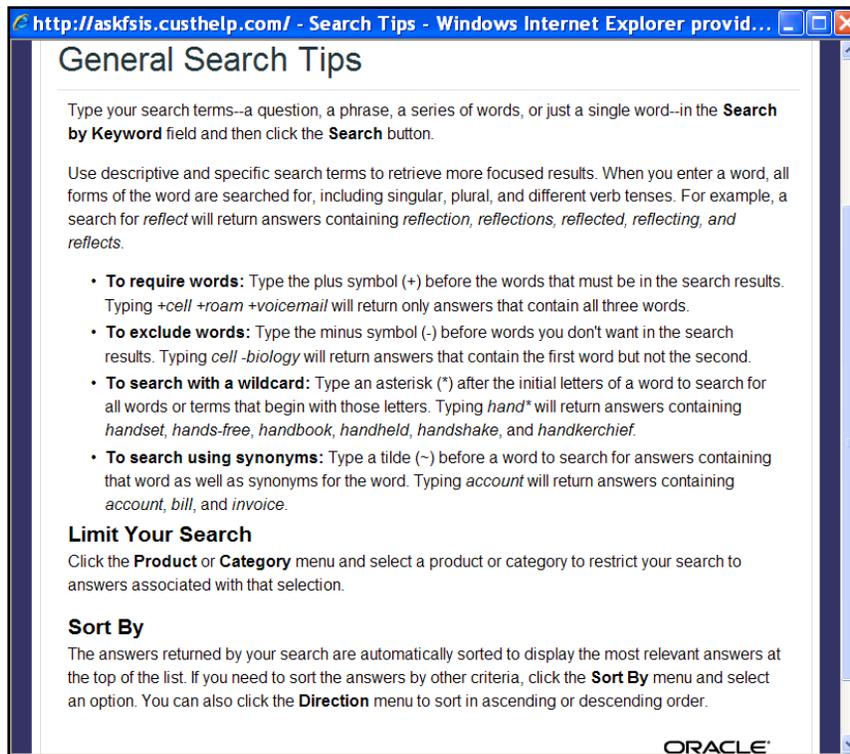
VI. SEARCHING THE ONLINE KNOWLEDGE BASE

A. Use of the searchable knowledge base of Q&As posted for public viewing in askFSIS can save the IPP time when seeking information. OPPD encourages IPP to search the knowledge base for answers to questions on topics such as exporting, importing, labeling, sampling, and other inspection-related policies, programs, and procedures.

B. IPP can search the list of posted questions and answers using the "Search" feature. IPP need to enter words or issuance numbers (e.g., meat, *E.coli* O157:H7, 10,010.1, or recalls) that will help limit the search in the "Find the answer to your Question" box and then click the "Search" button.

NOTE: For the most effective results to any search, IPP should limit the scope of their search as much as possible by using the "Limit by Product" and "Limit by Category" options.

C. For help regarding how to search more effectively, IPP can use the "Search Tips" link located above the 'Search' button. The "General Search Tips" window will open (below) and includes suggestions about how to improve the search in order to achieve the best results.

General Search Tips

Type your search terms--a question, a phrase, a series of words, or just a single word--in the **Search by Keyword** field and then click the **Search** button.

Use descriptive and specific search terms to retrieve more focused results. When you enter a word, all forms of the word are searched for, including singular, plural, and different verb tenses. For example, a search for *reflect* will return answers containing *reflection, reflections, reflected, reflecting, and reflects*.

- **To require words:** Type the plus symbol (+) before the words that must be in the search results. Typing *+cell +roam +voicemail* will return only answers that contain all three words.
- **To exclude words:** Type the minus symbol (-) before words you don't want in the search results. Typing *cell -biology* will return answers that contain the first word but not the second.
- **To search with a wildcard:** Type an asterisk (*) after the initial letters of a word to search for all words or terms that begin with those letters. Typing *hand** will return answers containing *handset, hands-free, handbook, handheld, handshake*, and *handkerchief*.
- **To search using synonyms:** Type a tilde (~) before a word to search for answers containing that word as well as synonyms for the word. Typing *account* will return answers containing *account, bill*, and *invoice*.

Limit Your Search

Click the **Product** or **Category** menu and select a product or category to restrict your search to answers associated with that selection.

Sort By

The answers returned by your search are automatically sorted to display the most relevant answers at the top of the list. If you need to sort the answers by other criteria, click the **Sort By** menu and select an option. You can also click the **Direction** menu to sort in ascending or descending order.

ORACLE

D. The application will return a list of questions and answers that it finds in response to the submitted search terms. If, after reviewing the search results, IPP still need assistance with a question, they can submit a question by following the instructions in Section VII below.

E. Because the knowledge base has a broad number of answers to commonly asked questions, the "Submit a Question" tab is not visible or available until IPP perform a search and have viewed at least one answer. After IPP have done so, the "Submit a Question" tab will become visible, and IPP can then type in a question.
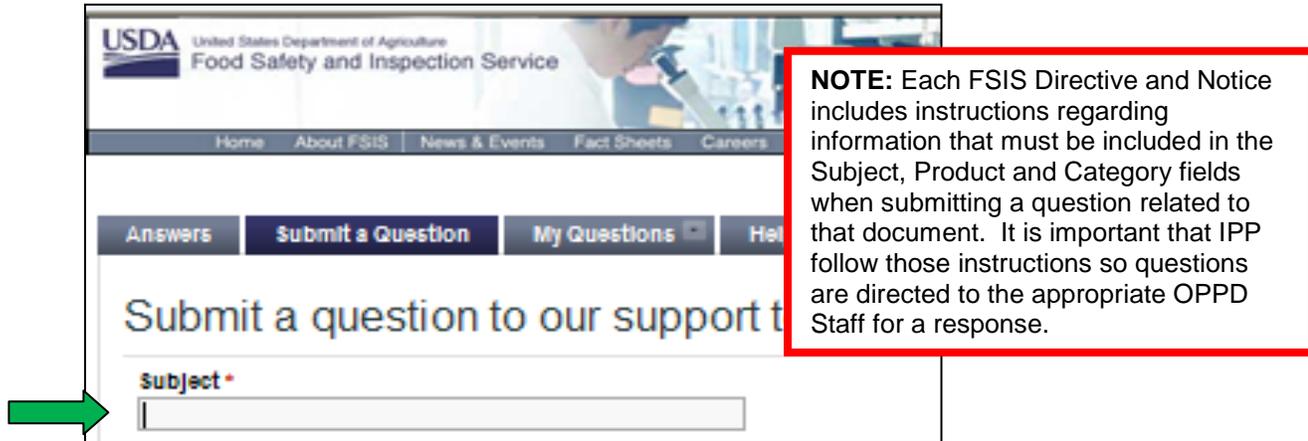
VII. SUBMITTING QUESTIONS THROUGH askFSIS

A. Although a IPP may search the askFSIS knowledge base before logging into the application, additional features, such as submitting a new question or reviewing one's history of Q&As, are available only <u>after</u> logging into the application.
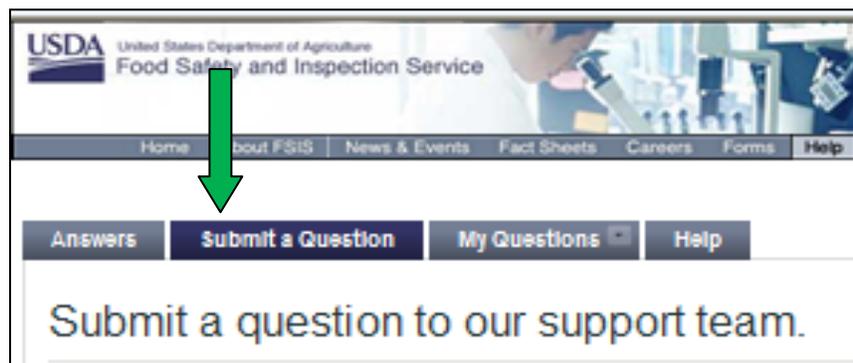
B. When submitting a question, IPP are required to complete the following fields:

1. Subject- The subject line needs to include words that are related to the question being submitted and, if applicable, the directive or notice number that is relevant to the question. The subject can also include the name of a specific Staff Officer, if one has been provided to the IPP, in a response to a previous question or as a subject matter expert.

NOTE: Each FSIS Directive and Notice includes instructions regarding information that must be included in the Subject, Product and Category fields when submitting a question related to that document. It is important that IPP follow those instructions so questions are directed to the appropriate OPPD Staff for a response.

NOTE: The information included on the Subject line should be specific to the question being asked. For example, if the question is about the regulatory requirements regarding the labeling of pepperoni, the subject line should be "Pepperoni Labeling" and not "HACCP". Following this approach will help expedite assigning each question to the most appropriate staff officer in OPPD.

2. Question- IPP need to provide as much detail as possible for the staff officer to be able to respond accurately to the question. IPP are to include the establishment name and number in their question. When critical details are omitted, the answer received may not be appropriate for the question submitted. Details in the question are necessary for staff officers to provide a targeted response to the IPP's question, especially when the question hinges on enforcement actions (e.g., a Notice of Intended Enforcement (NOIE)) that may be in effect in an establishment. Two people can submit what they believe is the same question, but depending upon the detail provided, they may get different answers to that same question.
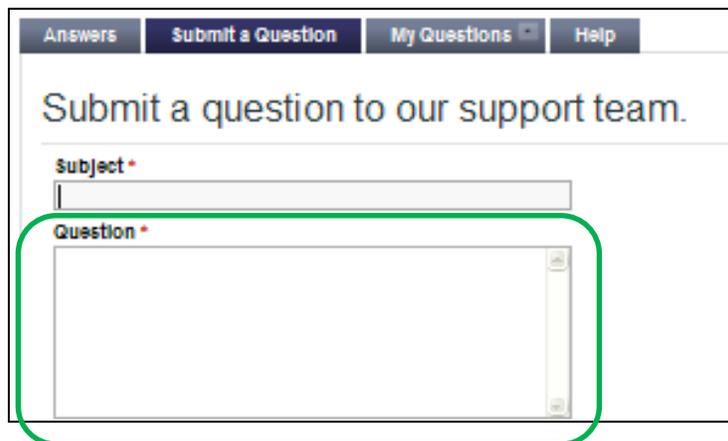
3. Product - It is very important for IPP to select the most appropriate "Product" and "Category" options from the drop-down menu because these selections affect how the application routes the question to the individual staffs for a response. Selecting an inappropriate "Product" or "Category" can delay the response because the question must first be re-routed to the correct OPPD staff. The following is a description of the four available "Product" options:

   a. General Inspection- to be used when asking any question other than Export, Import, or Labeling;

   b. Export - to be used when asking questions related to FSIS product being shipped to other countries;

   c. Import - to be used when asking questions related to product that is produced in other countries being received into the United States; and

   d. Labeling - to be used when asking questions related to labeling requirements, product standards of identity, product amenability, label claims, conditions of use statements, etc.

4. Category – There are 46 "Category" and 75 "Sub-category" options. See Attachment 1 for a complete listing for the category and sub-category options available within the application.

NOTE: Questions submitted under an inappropriate "Product" or "Category" will be re-routed to the appropriate queue; re-routing may result in a delay in receiving a response.

5. Policy Arena - The following are the two available "Policy" options:

   a. Domestic – to be used when asking questions related to product produced and shipped within the boundaries of the United States; and

   b. International – to be used when asking questions related to product received into or shipped out of the United States.

C. IPP can elect to include additional information (e.g., phone number, Establishment Number, Establishment Size) in the remaining appropriate fields and attach documents if necessary.

Note: IPP are not required to include the telephone number, establishment number, or establishment size when submitting a question but it is helpful to OPPD in case a staff officer needs to contact the IPP for follow-up

D. Based upon the product and category that the IPP select, the application directs questions to one of the following staffs of OPPD:

Figure 1		
Division	**Area of Responsibility**	**General Response Time**
International Relations and Strategic Planning Staff (IRSPS)	• Imports	4 business days
Import/Export Coordination and Policy Development Staff (IECPDS)	• Exports	4 business days
Labeling and Program Delivery Staff (LPDS)	• Labeling • Amenability Determinations • Product Standards • Ingredients • Conditions of Use Statements	5 business days
Risk, Innovations, and Management Staff (RIMS)	• Sampling • Enforcement Investigations and Analysis Officer (EIAO) Methodology • Validation • New technology general and submissions • Water Retention general and submissions	Water Retention Submission-Initial acknowledgement 2 business days and 30 business days to completion New Technology Submission-Initial acknowledgement 2 business days and 60 business days to completion

		All Others- 2 business days
Policy Development Staff (PDS)	• All Others	2 business days

NOTE: Each staff that responds to the questions submitted has determined the most appropriate timeframe to provide a final response to questions submitted to that particular staff. This timeframe may be extended if necessary based on available personnel, existing workloads, and the complexity of the question.

E. After the IPP clicks on "Continue," and before the application allows IPP to submit their question, the application generates a list of answers based on key words in the IPP's question. If this generated list of answers does not adequately address IPP's questions, IPP may submit their question by clicking on the "Finish Submitting Question" button.

F. When IPP submit a question, the application sends an automatic response with a reference number to the IPP's e-mail address. This automatic response provides important information about response times to questions received.

NOTE: A staff officer will respond within the timeframe defined in the automated response. There is no need for IPP to update the incident in order to request a response.

G. OPPD staff officers strive to provide consistent responses, and they use a number of tools to achieve that goal, including searching responses provided to similar questions that have been submitted by both the IPP and other askFSIS account holders. In addition, staff officers correlate daily within and between staffs in order to assure consistency. Because each response is specific to the information provided, responses provided may not be directly applicable to a different situation.

H. The application sends responses to both the IPP's e-mail address and to their askFSIS account. The responses remain within the application indefinitely, and IPP access them at any time by clicking on the 'My Questions' tab.

I. When the application provides a response to the IPP, the application does not automatically include the name of the staff officer that developed the response. Responses provided through askFSIS represent a response from OPPD and not from a specific staff officer. OPPD staff officers may elect to include their name when they develop a response as a means to facilitate follow-up if it is necessary.

NOTE: If IPP know the name of a specific staff officer that they would like to respond to a question, they can include it in the subject line, and the question will be directed to the staff officer if that staff officer is available. In addition, occasionally IPP submit questions directly to staff officers through Outlook instead of using askFSIS. Because askFSIS is the Agency's mechanism for evaluating policy effectiveness and for tracking policy trends, IPP will be directed to resubmit their question through askFSIS instead of through Outlook.

J. Once a response has been received; IPP can submit follow-up questions or additional information associated with the original question.

K. If more than two weeks have passed since the incident was marked "solved," IPP are asked to follow one of the options below:

1. IPP can submit a new incident, being sure to include the original incident number as reference. This will ensure that the new incident is routed to the staff office that responded to the original inciden; or.

2. IPP can call PDS at 1-800-233-3935 and ask to have the original incident reopened. IPP should have the original incident reference number available when calling. Once the incident is reopened, IPP use the "My Questions" tab to access the original incident by clicking on the subject of the incident to open a text box.

K. IPP should submit new questions on different topics separately instead of updating an existing submission. Submitting separate questions as described in this section increases the efficiency of the system, expedites providing a response, and improves data analysis.

VIII. PROVIDING FEEDBACK

A. IPP have two options available with which to provide feedback regarding the posted Q&As that are provided as a result of the IPP search:

1. Selecting "Yes" under "Was this answer helpful?" registers a single response and prevents additional "Yes" responses for that review of the question; or

2. Selecting "No" under "Was this answer helpful?" or when clicking the "Give Feedback" option opens a text box that allows IPP to enter up to 175 characters to enter their feedback.

B. When using the text boxes to provide feedback, IPP are to provide an explanation regarding why they felt that the posted question was, or was not, helpful.

NOTE: IPP are not to use these feedback options to ask policy-related questions. IPP are to submit a question following the instructions in Section VII above.

IX. MANAGING AN ACCOUNT USING THE "MY QUESTIONS" TAB

A. Once IPP have successfully logged into askFSIS, they can manage the account through the "My Questions" tab. Selecting the down arrow on the "My Questions" tab allows IPP to address the following topics:

1. Questions:

   a. The application maintains a history of each IPP's questions and responses, under the "My Questions" tab, that may be retrieved whenever the IPP has logged into askFSIS. The application stores the questions submitted by its reference number.
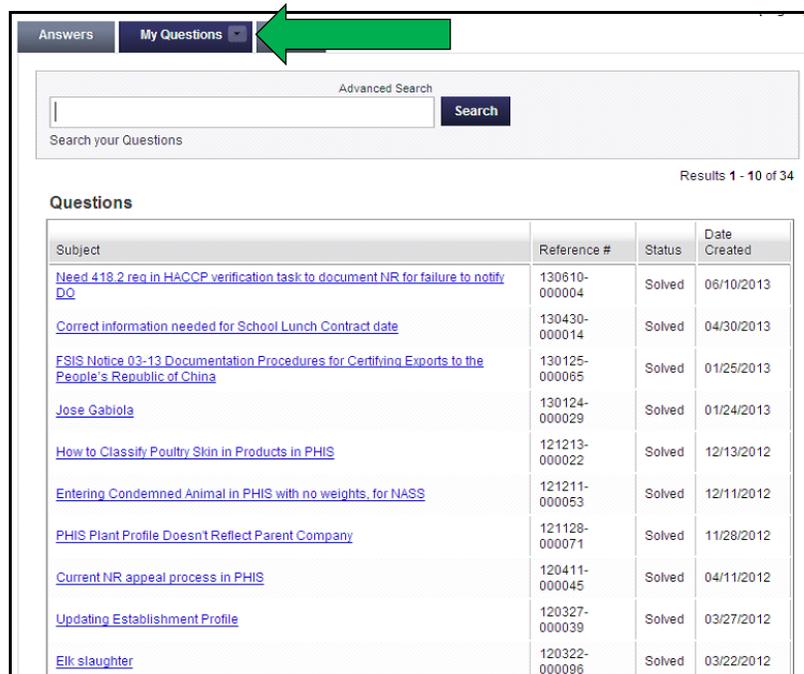
b. IPP can use the "My Questions" tab to review previously submitted questions and responses, to update responses, or designate that a response is no longer needed.

c. IPP can open any previous question by selecting the subject text. This action displays the "Communication History." When they select a question, IPP can update the question with additional information by selecting "Update Question" at the bottom of the screen. IPP then select "Submit" to complete the submission.

d. Occasionally, IPP may want to update a question marked "Solved," but they receive the following message: "*This incident cannot be reopened or updated. If you need further assistance, please submit a new question by clicking the 'Submit a Question' tab.*" Two options are available:

   i. Call 1-800-233-2335 and request to speak to the OPPD Staff that responded your question. IPP should or are to be prepared to provide the incident number that they would like have opened to the staff officer and should be prepared to leave a message; and

   ii. Submit a new question through askFSIS using process in Section VII above and include the reference number in the subject line.

2. Account settings:

   a. Changing a Username or Password

      i. IPP can reset their username or password by clicking the "Login" link or by clicking the "My Questions" tab and then selecting "Change Password." Accessing either option will direct the IPP to a screen that includes the "Forgot your username or password?" link.

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Please log in to continue ✕

Username

Password

Forgot your username or password?

Log In   Cancel

Answers | My Questions ▾ | Help

Account Settings

Account

Username *
john.doe@fsis.usda.gov

Change your password.

Contact Information

First Name *
John

Last Name *
Doe

Email Address *
john.doe@fsis.usda.gov

Customer Type *
FSIS at Establishment - Small ▾

Save Changes

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ii. After clicking on "Forgot your username or password?" the application directs IPP to the "Account Assistance" page where they can request their username or reset their password.

Answers | My Questions ▾ | Help

Account Assistance

Request your username
If the email address you enter is in our system, we'll send you your username. If you don't have a username, we'll send you a link to set up an account instead.

Email Address

Email My Username

> The correct e-mail address must be entered in order for a response to be received by the IPP

Reset your password
We'll email you a link to a page where you can create a new password.

Username

Reset My Password

> Note: User name is case sensitive

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iii. When IPP elect to change their username or password, the application will send an e-mail message containing further instructions to the e-mail address in the IPP' account.

NOTE: If IPP do not receive the e-mail, they need to make sure that their username and e-mail address are correct. In addition, some government e-mail addresses may contain a number after the last name. IPP need to include that number in order to receive the e-mail (e.g., john.doe2@fsis.usda.gov).

b. Contact Information- enables IPP to update the following:

i. Username- IPP can select any username they want to use;

ii. IPP name- IPP need to enter the name they want associated with the account (e.g., fist name, last name, nickname);

iii. E-mail address- IPP can enter their preferred e-mail address (e.g., their work or personal e-mail address); and

iv. IPP type- identifies the IPP's type (e.g., FSIS personnel, Establishment personnel, or Other) for data analysis purposes.

3. Notifications - IPP can also add notification of recently posted Q&As by Product and/or Category using the Notifications tab.

   a. Answer Notifications: The answers notifications area allows IPP to view all the individual answers on products or category topics they have subscribed to, using the process described in paragraph b below, and to delete answers that they are no longer interested in receiving update notifications on.

   b. Product/Category Notifications: IPP can subscribe, or unsubscribe, to receive notification that new answers have been posted for public viewing that are associated with a specific Product or Category.
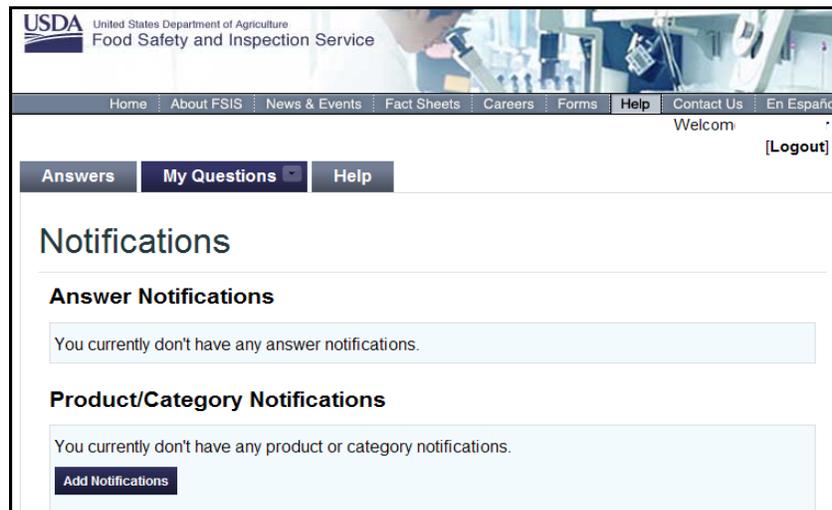
X. HELP TAB

A. The askFSIS Help tab allows IPP to get information related to a variety of issues including search tips, account settings, and other options.
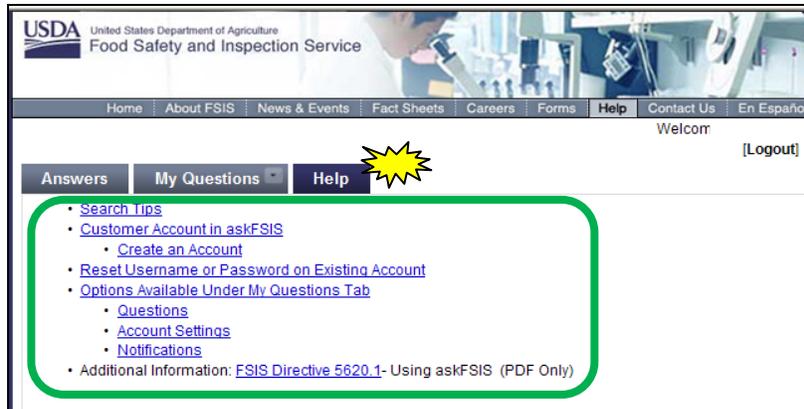
B. The following options are available under the "Help" tab:

1. Search Tips- Provides suggestions regarding how to effectively search the questions and answers posted for public viewing on the application;

2. IPP Account in askFSIS- Provides instructions regarding how to set up an askFSIS account, view submitted questions, access and change account settings;

3. Reset Username or Password for Existing Account- Provides step-by-step instructions regarding resetting username and password; and

4. Options Available Under "My Questions" Tab- Allows access to questions submitted, account setting and notifications.

XI. LOG OUT

IPP must click on "Logout" in order exit the application.
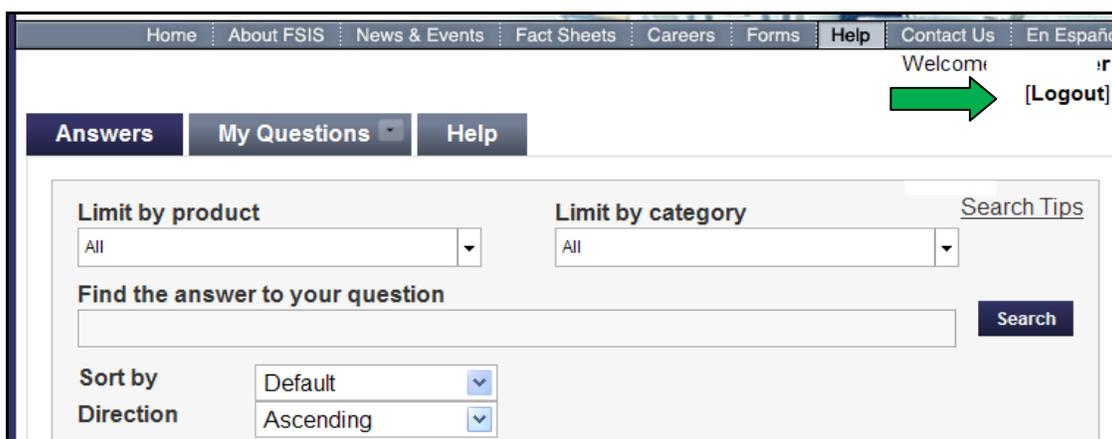
XII. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to assess the needs of IPP of this system, OPPD will analyze the questions received through askFSIS. The analysis will assess level of use, types of IPP (e.g., IPP, states, consumers, and industry), and other matters that reflect the effectiveness and perceived usefulness of the system. OPPD will specifically review askFSIS data related FSIS notices and directives to determine if trends exist in the frequency or type of policy cited. These analyses will be used, in part, to determine the effectiveness of the askFSIS system and make changes to the system as warranted by the analyses.

XIII. QUESTIONS

Refer questions regarding this directive to the Policy Development Staff through askFSIS or by telephone at 1-800-233-3935. When submitting a question, use the 'Submit a Question' tab, and enter the following information in the fields provided:

Subject Field:	Enter **Directive 5620.1**
Question Field:	Enter your question with as much **detail** as possible.
Product Field:	Select **General Inspection Policy** from the drop-down menu.
Category Field:	Select **Regulations/Agency Issuances** from the drop-down menu.
Policy Arena:	Select **Domestic (U.S.) Only** from the drop-down menu.

When all fields are complete, press **Continue** and at the next screen press **Finish Submitting Question.**

Rachel A. Edelstein

Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development

ATTACHMENT 1- PRODUCT & CATEGORY OPTION INFORMATION

PRODUCT	CATEGORY/SUB-CATEGORY
General Inspection Policy	Cooperative State Inspection Programs
	• Interstate Shipment
	• State MPI programs
	• Talmadge-Aikens
	Egg Products
	EIAO Methodology
	Federal Inspection
	• FSIS Jurisdiction
	• Grant of Federal Inspection
	• Performance Based Inspection System
	• Retail Exemptions
	Food Defense
	HACCP
	Miscellaneous
	New Technology
	• Egg Products
	• Ingredients
	• Inspection Procedures
	• New Technology Protocols
	• Notification
	• Processing Aid
	• Retained Water Protocol
	Processing
	• General
	• Thermal Processing
	Public Health Information System (PHIS)
	• Domestic Inspection
	• General Information
	• Sampling
	Recalls
	Regulations/Agency Issuances
	Residue
	Salmonella Initiative Program (SIP)
	• General
	• Irradiation
	Sampling
	• *E. coli* O157:H7
	• General
	• Generic E.coli
	• *Listeria monocytogenes*
	• Request *Salmonella* Verification Set
	• *Salmonella*
	• *Salmonella* Performance Standards
	Sanitation

	• Sanitation Performance Standards
	• Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures
	Slaughter
	• Custom
	• Humane Handling
	• Livestock
	• Poultry
EXPORT	Basic Export Answers
	Detained Product Cases
	Export Certificates
	• Errors in Certification
	• FSIS Form 9060-5
	• Letterhead Certificates
	• Supplemental Certificates
	Export Labeling
	Export Requirements
	• Interpretations
	• Regulations and Policies
	Plant Approval
	• Plant Lists
	• Plant Reviews
	Public Health Information System (PHIS)
	• Export Activities
	Returned Product
IMPORT	Basic Import Answers
	Labeling Compliance for Imported Product
	Public Health Information System (PHIS)
	• Import Activities
	Refused Entry Procedures
	Reinspection Requirements
	Sample Shipment Procedures
LABELING	Food Standards of Identity & Composition
	• Informal Policy Guides
	• Non-Standardized Foods
	• Regulatory Standards
	Ingredients/Additives
	• Additives
	• Allergens
	• Flavorings
	• FSIS-FDA Ingredient Approval
	• Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)
	• Ingredients
	Jurisdiction Amenability & Inspection
	• Amenability Rules
	• Exotic Species
	• Pet Foods
	• Religious Exemptions

	• Voluntary/Reimbursable Service
	Labeling Approval Procedures
	• Appeals
	• Label Application
	• Label Evaluation Status
	• Label Submissions
	• Labeling Record Keeping Requirements
	• Required Features
	• Temporary
	Labeling Regulations, Policies & Claims
	• Animal Production
	• Egg Product Labeling
	• General Labeling Requirements
	• Labeling of Imported/Exported Product
	• Natural and All Natural Claims
	• Nutrient Content and Health Claims
	• Nutrition Facts
	• Organic Claims
	• Processing
	• RTE/NRTE Products
	• Special Claims