



United States Department of Agriculture

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Food Safety and  
Inspection Service

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National Chicken Council  
North American Meat Institute  
National Turkey Federation  
USA Poultry and Egg Export Council

I am responding to your letter of January 30, 2015, requesting a 90-day extension of the comment period for the *Federal Register* notice, “Changes to the *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* Verification Testing Program: Proposed Performance Standards for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in Not-Ready-to-Eat Comminuted Chicken and Turkey Products and Raw Chicken Parts and Related Agency Verification Procedures and Other Changes to Agency Sampling” (80 FR 3940; Jan. 26, 2015). Your letter also requested a 90-day delay in all implementation dates for the various actions FSIS announced in the notice to ensure the Agency has an opportunity to consider the comments and to ensure that the affected industry has enough time to prepare for changes in Agency actions.

In response to your request, FSIS will extend the comment period by an additional 60 days and will announce this extension in the *Federal Register*. FSIS believes that 60 days should be sufficient because FSIS has made available much of the information in the January 2015 *Federal Register* notice, in other *Federal Register* notices<sup>1</sup> and in the *Salmonella Action Plan*.<sup>2</sup> FSIS will fully consider all comments received in response to the notice. FSIS will not, however, delay implementation of actions announced in the notice. The new sampling that FSIS announced is intended to gather information. Therefore, in March 2015, FSIS will proceed with implementing sampling of raw chicken parts to gain additional information on the prevalence and the microbiological characteristics of *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in those products.<sup>3</sup> FSIS will analyze this data and will discuss it in the *Federal Register* announcing final standards. In March 2015, FSIS will also begin exploratory sampling of raw pork products for pathogens of public health concern, as well as for indicator organisms.<sup>4</sup> Finally, FSIS will begin sampling imported poultry carcasses, imported raw chicken parts, and imported not-ready-to-eat comminuted chicken and turkey for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in March 2015.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, 78 FR 53017; Aug. 28, 2013, and 79 FR 32436; Jun. 5, 2014

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/foodborne-illness-and-disease/salmonella/sap>

<sup>3</sup> 80 FR at 3945

<sup>4</sup> 80 FR at 3942

<sup>5</sup> 80 FR at 3944

Similarly in March 2015, for all products that are currently under *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter* performance standards, FSIS will proceed with using the moving window approach to assess whether establishment meet those standards. FSIS does not see a reason to extend analyzing standards according to the moving window approach because FSIS previously announced that it intended to do so and requested comments on this approach.<sup>6</sup> FSIS responded to those comments<sup>7</sup> and provided additional information in the January 2015 *Federal Register* notice.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, FSIS does not expect establishment categories to change to a large extent when the Agency discontinues the set approach and starts using the moving window approach. Therefore, this change should not have a significant effect on establishments.

FSIS will also proceed with posting aggregate reports for not-ready-to-eat comminuted chicken and turkey in March 2015 as part of the *Salmonella* quarterly report. As data become available following the new testing for chicken parts that FSIS will begin in March, FSIS will also begin posting aggregate reports for chicken parts, as part of the *Salmonella* quarterly report. Until FSIS establishes final standards for these products, establishments may use these reports to increase their awareness of the pathogen incidence in these products and compare the on-going incidence in their establishments against the results made public by FSIS. Establishments may also choose to make changes in their procedures as necessary to control *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*, particularly if the levels of these pathogens in their products are higher than the proposed standard.

Finally, beginning July 1, 2015, the Agency plans to begin web-posting individual establishment category information for chicken and turkey carcasses. However, as stated in the notice, we will assess the comments on that issue prior to posting. FSIS plans to assess what category establishments are in as of July 1, using combined historical set data and sample results beginning March 2015. Meanwhile, FSIS will continue web-posting existing Category 3 poultry carcass establishments.

If you have any further questions, please let me know. We look forward to receiving your comments on the issues raised in the *Federal Register* notice.

Sincerely,



Alfred V. Almanza  
Deputy Under Secretary  
Office of Food Safety

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<sup>6</sup> 78 FR at 53019

<sup>7</sup> 79 FR at 32439

<sup>8</sup> 80 FR at 3946