

except holidays. Persons wishing to inspect comments are requested to call ahead on (202) 690-2817 to facilitate entry into the comment reading room.

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The National Poultry Improvement Plan (referred to below as "the Plan") is a cooperative Federal-State-industry mechanism for controlling certain poultry diseases. The Plan consists of a variety of programs intended to prevent and control egg-transmitted, hatchery-disseminated poultry diseases. Participation in all Plan programs is voluntary, but flocks, hatcheries, and dealers must qualify as "U.S. Pullorum-Typhoid Clean" before participating in any other Plan program. Also, the regulations in 9 CFR part 82, subpart B, which provide for certain testing, restrictions on movement, and other restriction on certain chickens, eggs, and other articles due to the presence of *Salmonella enteritidis*, require that no hatching eggs or newly hatched chicks from egg-type chicken breeding flocks may be moved interstate unless they are classified "U.S. Sanitation Monitored" under the Plan or they meet the requirements of a State classification plan that the Administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has determined to be equivalent to the Plan, in accordance with 9 CFR 145.23(d).

The Plan identifies States, flocks, hatcheries, and dealers that meet certain disease control standards specified in the Plan's various programs. As a result, customers can buy poultry that has tested clean of certain diseases or that has been produced under disease-prevention conditions.

The regulations in 9 CFR parts 145 and 147 (referred to below as the regulations) contain the provisions of the Plan. APHIS amends these provisions from time to time to incorporate new scientific information and technologies within the Plan. In this document, we are proposing to amend the regulations to:

1. Require the ratio of male to female birds in representative samples taken from certain flocks for pullorum-typhoid testing to reflect the ratio of male to female birds in the flock from which the sample was taken;

2. Alter the number of birds serologically monitored for *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* and *M. synoviae* in egg-type and meat-type chicken breeding flocks;

3. Allow the use of a federally licensed enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) test for the serological screening of egg-type chickens in the "U.S. S. Enteritidis Monitored" program;

4. Allow the use of fishmeal as an animal protein source for meat-type breeding chickens and turkey breeding flocks;

5. Establish a new "U.S. S. Enteritidis Clean" classification for primary meat-type chicken breeding flocks;

6. Establish a new "U.S. M. Synoviae Clean State" classification for turkeys;

7. Provide alternative reporting methods for participating waterfowl, exhibition poultry, and game bird flocks;

8. Establish a maximum number of positive samples for *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* or *M. synoviae* that would be examined using the hemagglutination inhibition (HI) and/or serum plate dilution (SPD) tests;

9. Allow the use of a colony lift assay as a supplemental screening test to aid in the detection of group D salmonella suspect colonies on selective and non-selective agar culture plates;

10. Establish new procedures for collecting environmental samples and cloacal swabs from egg-type and meat-type chicken flocks and waterfowl, exhibition poultry, and game bird flocks for bacteriological examination;

11. Provide a laboratory protocol for the bacteriological examination of baby chicks from egg-type and meat-type chicken flocks and waterfowl, exhibition poultry, and game bird flocks; and

12. Modify the composition of the Plan's General Conference Committee.

These proposed amendments, with the exception of number 10, are consistent with the recommendations approved by the voting delegates to the National Plan Conference that was held from June 26 to 28, 1994. Proposed amendment number 10 was approved by the voting delegates to the National Plan Conference that was held from June 30 to July 2, 1992. Participants in the 1992 and 1994 National Plan Conferences represented flockowners, breeders, hatcherymen, and Official State Agencies from all cooperating States. The proposed amendments are discussed in greater detail below.

Amendment 1—Blood Testing

Blood testing is used to qualify flocks for official Plan classifications such as

U.S. Pullorum-Typhoid Clean.

Generally, the regulations require all the birds in a flock to be blood tested for the flock to achieve or maintain its status, but some Plan programs allow, under certain conditions, a representative sample of birds to be blood tested in lieu of the entire flock. Section 145.14 provides that such representative samples must include a minimum of 30 birds from each house, with at least one bird taken from each pen and unit in the house. We would amend § 145.14 to further require, for meat-type chicken and waterfowl, exhibition poultry, and game bird flocks, that the ratio of male to female birds in the representative sample reflect the ratio of male to female birds in the flock. Requiring a representative number of male and female birds to be included in the sample would ensure that the samples provide an accurate representation of the birds in any given meat-type chicken or waterfowl, exhibition poultry, or game bird flock when blood testing is required.

Amendment 2—Monitoring for *Mycoplasma Gallisepticum* and *M. Synoviae*

Sections 145.23(c) and 145.33(c) set forth the criteria for attaining and maintaining the "U.S. M. Gallisepticum Clean" classification in, respectively, egg-type and meat-type chicken breeding flocks. Similarly, §§ 145.23(e) and 145.33(e) set forth the criteria for attaining and maintaining the "U.S. M. Synoviae Clean" classification in egg-type and meat-type chicken breeding flocks.

To retain the *M. gallisepticum* or *M. synoviae* "Clean" classification, the regulations require that a sample of at least 150 birds from the flock be tested for the program disease at intervals of not more than 90 days. The regulations provide that a sample of fewer than 150 birds may be tested at any one time if the flockowner has received the approval of the Official State Agency and the concurrence of APHIS, as long as a total of 150 birds are tested within each 90-day period. Based on our experience with these programs, we believe that it is no longer necessary to require flockowners to receive the approval of the Official State Agency and the concurrence of APHIS before testing a sample of fewer than 150 birds. Therefore, we are proposing to amend paragraphs (c)(1)(i) and (e)(1)(i) in both § 145.23 and § 145.33 to remove the official approval and concurrence requirement; we would require only that the flockowner ensure that all pens are equally represented in each sample of fewer than 150 birds. The flockowner