Inspector in Charge within 14 days from the day the process exceeded the limits. This report would have to be updated on a weekly basis until the process is back within the Acceptable Limit.

During the time the results exceed the moving sum limit, sampling should be conducted at a higher rate of at least two specimens per day. This will provide more accurate and timely data for effective decisionmaking. This increased sampling has the advantage that, assuming that the problem causing the initial deviation from the target limit has been identified and corrected, the extra samples per day will shorten the time frame (window) during which the establishment would be considered operating above targets. The sampling rate would return to normal when the moving sum value meets the AL. Additional testing may be conducted by FSIS, at the Agency's discretion, as necessary to assist firms in meeting pathogen reduction targets.

10. Relationship to HACCP

Once an operation has a history of consistent control and is operating within the established limits, improvements in technology and increased understanding of process control can be used to further enhance pathogen reduction efforts. The continuous review of the production process with corresponding improvements should set the stage for implementation of state-of the-art process controls, namely HACCP.

FSIS is aware of and continues to encourage establishments to implement effective HACCP programs as soon as possible. Establishments that can demonstrate that their HACCP process controls produce only products that meet or exceed the proposed targets for pathogen reduction, and have an alternate verification program may, upon approval by the Administrator, continue their current operating procedure in lieu of the proposed verification program.

All establishments that have slaughter operations or produce raw, ground beef or poultry are required to participate in this program unless prior approval is granted by the Administrator, in a situation where an establishment has instituted a HACCP system. That system includes pathogen testing which, in the judgment of the Administrator, meets or exceeds the testing requirements in the proposed regulations.

11. Alternative Approaches to Establishing Pathogen Reduction Baselines and Targets

The principle underlying the proposed approach to pathogen

reduction outlined above is that production of raw meat and poultry with an incidence of Salmonella at or below the national incidence level is readily achievable with available technology and production methods and that all establishments should be required in the relative near term to perform at this level. This would establish a national standard for food safety performance on which future pathogen reduction efforts could be built. One potential disadvantage of this approach is that it does not take account of the likelihood that current incidence levels of Salmonella contamination vary widely. In the case of broilers, for example, FSIS believes that some establishments are already performing well below the 25 percent baseline incidence found in the FSIS survey-at a 5 percent incidence level or lowerwhile many establishments are performing well above that level. Some of the poorer performing establishments may not be able to achieve reductions to the targeted prevalence of contamination in the near-term. The better performing companies—ones already performing well below the national baseline-may feel economic pressure to relax their pathogen reduction efforts to compete under a standard that is less strict than they are already achieving.

An alternative approach would be to establish the initial baseline for pathogen reduction on an establishment-specific basis and to require significant interim reductions in each establishment from its baseline. Such baselines would be established on the basis of either reliable existing data from that establishment or on a brief required period of sampling and testing in each establishment for the target pathogen.

This approach would have some advantages. It would take account of the likelihood that current performance in terms of incidence of Salmonella contamination varies widely. Requiring, for example, a 50 percent reduction from the establishment-specific baseline would ensure that some pathogen reduction is achieved by all establishments and a larger reduction, in absolute terms, would be required by establishments that currently have higher incidences of contamination. This approach might achieve a greater overall reduction in incidence of contamination, depending on the percent reduction required for each establishment and the actual current distribution of incidence rates across all establishments.

The establishment-specific baseline approach has disadvantages. It would be

more difficult to administer because it would require the creation of approximately 2,500 establishmentspecific baselines, and it would not be based on the principle that there should be a nationally recognized measure of food safety performance, regardless of the establishment in which a product is produced. The establishment-specific approach would also fail to recognize that some establishments are already operating in accordance with the current state of the art and may have difficulty achieving significant additional reduction in the near term.

The latter concern might be addressed by hybrids of the two basic alternatives outlined above. For example, establishments currently above the national baseline could be required to reduce the incidence of contamination to some level at or below the national baseline, while the better performing establishments could be required to maintain their current level of performance, perhaps within some appropriate range.

FSIS invites public comment on these and other possible alternatives to its proposed approach. At the final rule stage FSIS intends to adopt an approach to setting interim targets for pathogen reduction that takes into account its proposal, the alternatives outlined here, and the comments received during the course of this rulemaking.

C. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) Systems

1. Background

Overview of Rationale for Adopting HACCP

After having introduced key HACCP concepts and controls into federally inspected establishments through the proposed near-term interventions and microbial testing program discussed earlier in this document, FSIS would secure its long-term strategy for improving the safety of meat and poultry products by requiring that all such establishments adopt HACCP systems. HACCP is a systematic approach to the identification and control of hazards associated with food production that is widely recognized by scientific authorities, such as the NAS and the NACMCF and international organizations, such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and the International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF), and used in the food industry to produce product in compliance with health and safety requirements. HACCP provides assurances and documentation that processes used in manufacturing meat and poultry products are in control