

FSIS is also establishing a single point of contact in the Agency regarding technology development and implementation. This will be the newly constituted office of technology development in the Science and Technology Program. This office will serve as the initial point of contact for all inquiries about technology development, and it will help coordinate evaluations that involve multiple divisions in the Agency so that responses to inquiries will be timely and complete.

This office will also coordinate development of, and make available to interested parties, a single guideline for experimental protocols to be submitted to the Agency prior to commencing an in-plant study of a new technology. Some new technologies need to be evaluated in in-plant trials to determine their safety and effectiveness before they can be appropriately evaluated by FSIS. The Agency does not intend to impede those trials, but it must be assured that they produce data that will be adequate to address the Agency's concerns. Thus, one important element of the guideline will be a description of the information that must be submitted to satisfy the Agency's basic safety concerns. For those circumstances in which the Agency will be evaluating the efficacy of a technology, the guideline will provide detailed information about the Agency's expectations for data offered to demonstrate efficacy. This information will address such areas as the quality of the experimental design, the necessary quantity and quality of data, the plan for data analysis, and other relevant elements.

Finally, FSIS intends to interact publicly with the regulated industry and all interested parties to foster the development of beneficial new food safety technologies and to improve how the Agency plays its role in this critical area. In areas where FSIS is engaged in technology development of its own to advance its regulatory objectives, the Agency intends to identify research that is needed to support its efforts. FSIS is also interested in learning more about the opportunities that exist for improving food safety through the adoption by establishments of scientifically sound processes and technologies in both slaughter and processing operations, and the Agency seeks public input on its effort to improve its systems for reviewing and approving new technologies. As a first step, FSIS intends to hold a public meeting on these topics during the comment period on the regulations proposed elsewhere in this document. Details on the time, place and agenda

for this meeting will be published in a future issue of the **Federal Register**.

#### *F. FSIS Inspectional Roles*

The current FSIS program, as described in Part I of this document, is fundamentally an inspection program. It is a program designed to ensure through inspection that proper sanitary practices are observed, that organoleptically detectable defects, including diseased and contaminated carcasses, are excluded from the food supply, and that other requirements and standards related to safety, economic adulteration, and misbranding are met.

The long-term FSIS food safety strategy and the HACCP proposal set forth in this document will bring about substantial change in industry practice and in the FSIS program, as the Agency clarifies and reinforces the industry's responsibility for producing safe food, prepares to play its oversight role to ensure companies are implementing HACCP properly, and works to ensure that all participants in the food system—producers, processors, distributors and retailers—are meeting their food safety responsibilities.

With these changes, inspection of products and practices will remain central to the FSIS program. HACCP verification will necessarily expand the roles in-plant inspectors will be called upon to play, and HACCP will enhance the contribution in-plant inspection can make to ensuring the safety of food. In addition, the need to address food safety across the continuum from the farm to the consumer, as discussed in the preceding sections of this document, raises the question of the role FSIS inspectional oversight should play outside of slaughter and processing establishments.

Although the demands that will be placed on the FSIS inspection force by HACCP and other elements of the Agency's food safety strategy will develop over the next two to four years, it is important that FSIS begin considering now the future roles of the FSIS inspection program and how FSIS can maximize the contribution its inspectors make to ensuring the safety of the food supply. One of the Agency's most important challenges and obligations is, by means of training and a clear definition of roles and responsibilities, to prepare its workforce to meet the demands of the future.

In the course of developing the food safety strategy and regulatory proposals set forth in this document, FSIS has consulted with the National Joint Council (NJC) of Food Inspection Locals of the American Federation of Government Employees, which

represents the Agency's food inspectors, as well as organizations representing the Agency's veterinarians (National Association of Federal Veterinarians (NAFV)) and technical and supervisory personnel (Association of Technical and Supervisory Personnel (ATSP)). The Agency will continue this consultation throughout the pathogen reduction and HACCP rulemaking process. FSIS also intends to work closely with the bargaining unit and the employee organizations in formulating a plan for the optimal utilization of the Agency's inspectional workforce, and FSIS will comply fully with its obligations under the Basic Agreement with the NJC to bargain on matters that impact inspectors.

The Agency's employees and their representatives are strongly committed to ensuring the safety of the food supply and building the best possible food safety program. They have a critically important expertise and perspective that must be brought to bear in developing optimal roles and responsibilities for FSIS employees.

Many of the current roles of FSIS inspectors are controlled by the statutory mandates for: (1) Carcass-by-carcass inspection in slaughter establishments; (2) continuous FSIS inspectional presence in all processing establishments; and (3) inspectional responsibilities for non-safety wholesomeness and economic adulteration. FSIS is committed to carrying out these existing mandates. Moreover, changes in FSIS inspectional roles will be constrained by the level of resources available to support the inspection program. Nevertheless, some of the inspectional issues FSIS expects to be addressing are outlined below.

FSIS recognizes that food safety begins at the original point of production of the food animal—the farm—and can be affected at every step along the way, including each step of animal production and transportation leading to delivery of the animal to the slaughterhouse. Many in the agricultural producer community have recognized the potential for applying quality assurance principles, including HACCP, on the farm to prevent the introduction of potential food safety hazards at their source. Although the Agency welcomes this initiative, FSIS does not currently have and does not anticipate on-farm inspectional authority.

As discussed in Part I, the first point of FSIS inspection is the antemortem inspection that occurs just before animals enter the slaughter process. It is appropriate to consider whether FSIS should broaden its antemortem inspectional oversight of conditions