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USDA Actions

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USDA regularly implements operational and regulatory changes that affect the status of food and nutrition in the United States. Here are some recent actions.

Sales Exemptions for Meat and Poultry Changed. USDA increased the value of meat that retailers can sell to hotels, restaurants, and similar institutions without Federal inspection from \$30,500 to \$31,600. The ceiling for poultry was decreased from \$31,000 to \$28,100. Retail meat and poultry sellers are exempt from Federal inspection if their total sales stay below the limit set by USDA each year, and if sales to institutions do not exceed 25 percent of total annual sales.

Varroa Mite Quarantine Lifted. USDA removed the Federal quarantine imposed on 13 States infested with the Varroa mite, a parasite of honeybees. The States are Florida, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin. According to USDA, the regulatory program established under the quarantine was not the appropriate method to contain the spread of the mites.

CITE Test Approved for Brucellosis. USDA has approved the concentration immunoassay technology (CITE) test as an official supplement to standard card tests for brucellosis in cattle and bison. The CITE test permits diagnostic testing in the stockyard and provides faster results than if the blood was sent to a laboratory. The standard card test is so sensitive that cattle and bison with residual brucellosis vaccine antibodies

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CITE tests for brucellosis in cattle provide faster results than sending blood to the laboratory.

may test positive even though they do not carry the disease. The supplemental CITE test will help clarify these erroneous results and avoid destruction of valuable animals. Negative brucellosis tests are required for interstate movements of many cattle and bison. Official tests also are used to determine whether producers will be compensated for destroyed animals.

Inspection Chief Named U.S. Codex Coordinator. Lester M. Crawford, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), has been named U.S. coordinator for Codex Alimentarius Commission activities. The commission, sponsored by the United Nation's World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization, sets international food hygiene and other standards to protect public health and promote free trade. Crawford will retain his post as FSIS administrator.

Agricultural Trade Mission Teams Appointed. Seven private sector and Government officials met with their counterparts in the Philippines and Hong Kong to discuss agricultural trade prospects and other mutual agricultural interests. An eight-member trade mission team met with officials in Indonesia and Singapore. The visits took place during May 1988 as part of a series of U.S. agricultural trade and development missions jointly sponsored by USDA, the State Department, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Congress authorized the program in December 1987 to encourage greater U.S.-private sector and foreign country participation in U.S. agricultural trade and development activities.

Final Rule Issued on Notifying Suspected Meat Act Violators. Under a new rule, USDA must notify suspected violators of the Federal Meat Inspection

Act (FMIA) that evidence is being referred to the Justice Department for possible criminal prosecution. The Processed Products Inspection Improvement Act of 1986 requires USDA to give notice to suspected violators of FMIA. However, the 1986 Act also gives USDA authority to establish exemptions.

USDA does not have to provide prior notice in five types of cases. These include instances where evidence could be destroyed or altered, covert operations or other investigations might be compromised, the suspected violator might flee to avoid prosecution, bribery or clandestine slaughtering or meat processing is suspected, or violations involving laws other than the FMIA may be involved.

Overtime Rates for Federal Inspection Increased. USDA increased overtime rates charged for Federal inspection of meat and poultry plants, hourly rates for voluntary inspection and certification services, and charges for laboratory work. According to USDA, the higher rates are necessary to cover the costs of inspections, including salary increases for Federal employees as well as agency costs such as travel and benefits. Overtime rates for Federal inspection of meat and poultry plants increased from \$22.84 to \$24.68 per hour. Hourly rates for voluntary inspection and certification services rose from \$19.04 to \$21.16, and charges for laboratory work increased from \$41.36 to \$43.80. Under Federal law, USDA assumes inspection costs during regular working hours in plants

producing meat and poultry products for interstate and foreign commerce. However, USDA is authorized to charge plants for all mandatory inspection services beyond approved work schedules, voluntary laboratory work, and all voluntary inspection and certification services.

USDA To Allow Interstate Movement of Certain Organisms. Certain genetically engineered microorganisms can now be moved interstate between research facilities without a permit. Scientists from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) have found that, when properly packaged, the commonly used laboratory organisms do not pose a risk to people, plants, animals, or the environment. The microorganisms being exempted are not only nontoxic but cannot survive outside of carefully controlled laboratory conditions. The exempted microorganisms are *Escherichia coli* genotype K-12 and its derivatives, sterile strains of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, and asporogenic (nonspore forming) strains of *Bacillus subtilis*. The organisms must not contain genetic sequences that allow them to invade or damage plants. Shippers must follow conditions outlined by APHIS.

Administrator Named for APHIS. James W. Glosser has been appointed administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Glosser will administer programs related to animal and plant health and quarantine, humane treatment of animals, and the control and eradication of pests and diseases.

Glosser joined USDA in December 1983 as assistant administrator of APHIS, and became associate administrator in July 1985. He served as acting administrator of the agency following the death of Donald Houston earlier this year.

Louisiana Recognized as Citrus-Producing Area. USDA has recognized the entire State of Louisiana as a commercial citrus-producing area. As a result, citrus fruit from areas quarantined because of citrus canker may not enter Louisiana without a certificate indicating the fruit meets stringent restrictions. Previously, only a small part of southern Louisiana was designated as a commercial citrus area. Florida is the only State quarantined because of citrus canker. The disease can cause defoliation and other serious damage to leaves and twigs of certain citrus plants. It can also damage fruit, making it unmarketable.

Field Testing of Genetically Engineered Tomatoes Approved. USDA issued a permit to the Monsanto Agricultural Company of St. Louis to allow field testing of genetically engineered tomato plants that are designed to resist certain insect pests. The resistance was created by introducing a naturally occurring protein toxic to certain insects into the plants. When susceptible insects, such as the tomato hornworm, the cabbage looper, or the corn rootworm, eat the plant, they die from the toxin. The protein is nontoxic to humans, wild or domestic birds, fish, mammals, or most other insects. ■