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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.

Requirements for New Poultry Inspection System Issued. USDA issued final requirements for facilities and equipment to be used in the poultry Streamlined Inspection System (SIS). The SIS is a relatively new, cost-effective approach to poultry inspection that places more responsibility on the industry, according to Lester M. Crawford, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

SIS is one of several new inspection processing systems implemented since 1979. After slaughter, SIS inspectors determine which birds are salvaged, reprocessed, condemned, retained, or passed subject to reinspection. Then plant employees, following the inspectors' directions, mark carcasses for trimming. After trimming, inspectors reexamine the carcasses to ensure the defects have been removed.

The final rule lists dimensions for inspection and reinspection facilities that are necessary to the new system. The rule has other equipment maintenance requirements to ensure proper lighting, handwashing facilities, adjustable platforms, and carcass selection devices at inspection stations.

Approximately 145 poultry plants use SIS to slaughter cornish game hens and broilers. While the costs of complying with the new requirements are expected to be minor, USDA estimates that the



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savings in overtime inspection costs and increased productivity will be substantial.

FSIS inspects meat and poultry for safety, wholesomeness, and accurate labeling. The agency also inspects premises, facilities, and equipment for cleanliness and sanitation. FSIS approves equipment for processing plants and blueprints for plant changes or alterations, and determines facility and equipment requirements for post-slaughter inspection systems.

Field Trials To Test Herbicide Tolerance of Plants. USDA has issued limited field trial permits to Calgene, Inc. of Davis, California, to test tobacco and tomato plants that have been genetically engineered to tolerate two herbicides, bromoxynil and glyphosate. These herbicides degrade rapidly in the environment and are less toxic to animals than

many others commonly used to fight weeds.

Weeds have always been one of the biggest problems in agriculture, competing with crops for both water and nutrients. Using herbicide-tolerant plants would allow farmers to spray for weeds without harming the crop. This could have an enormous economic impact on American agriculture in terms of higher crop yields and lower costs, according to James W. Glosser, administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Genetically engineered plants have the potential to improve traditional methods of agricultural production. More advancements may come as similar plants make the steady but cautious transition from the laboratory to the greenhouse, to the field, and eventually to the marketplace.

Inspection Regulations Revised.

USDA revised regulations covering the inspection and certification of rice, beans, peas, lentils, and processed grain commodities. The new regulations, which were issued under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, remove the requirement that information gathered during an inspection be reported on the official certificate. The requirement is retained, however, if the commodity falls below the highest quality grade. The regulations also establish provisions for retesting nongraded commodities and permitting appeal inspections on new samples when insect fragments are found in original samples during initial inspections.

W. Kirk Miller, administrator of USDA's Federal Grain Inspection Service, said the regulations, which were last revised in 1976, "will combine and

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consolidate compatible regulatory requirements, simplify overall language, and establish conformity with current marketing practices."

Final Guidelines on Collecting Beef Assessments Issued. USDA announced a final rule governing collection of assessments under the Beef Promotion and Research Order. A \$1 per head assessment on cattle marketed in the United States has been collected since October 1, 1986. An equivalent assessment is made on imported beef and cattle. The funds finance a program operated by the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board to strengthen retail beef sales.

Under the final rule, buyers in 41 States must remit the assessments to State beef councils that have been qualified by the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board. Cattle buyers in the remaining States must send assessments directly to the Beef Board in Kansas City, Missouri. The rule designates 11 States where, in certain types of sales, inspectors checking the validity of brand-

ing marks on individual cattle traded will collect assessments, and cattle purchasers are not required to remit assessments to their State beef councils. The rule also specifies how cattle sales not subject to assessment are verified.

A referendum was held May 10 to determine if cattle producers and cattle and beef importers wanted the checkoff to continue. Almost 79 percent of those voting favored the program. Since the Beef Promotion and Research Act of 1985 does not provide for refunds after the passage of the referendum, producers and importers cannot receive refunds of assessments on cattle sold after May 27.

Alternate Substances Allowed in Approved Meat Binder. USDA now allows meat processors to use glucono delta-lactone as an alternate acidic substance in a dry binder for restructured meat products. The substance also can be used to adjust the acid level in other meat and poultry products.

Since August 1986, processors have combined 1 percent sodium alginate, 2 percent calcium carbonate, and 0.3 per-

cent lactic acid and calcium lactate to create a dry mixture that binds restructured meat patties, roasts, and other meat products. The rule allows processors to substitute 0.3 percent glucono delta-lactone for lactic acid and calcium lactate in the binder. The mixture cannot exceed 1.5 percent of the product's content, which is the level of dry mixture approved by the Food and Drug Administration as safe for use in food.

Glucono delta-lactone and other substances used in the binder must be included in a statement next to the product name. For example, a restructured beef nugget may be labeled "Beef nugget—chopped, shaped, and formed, sodium alginate, glucono delta-lactone, and calcium carbonate added."

Analytical data show that glucono delta-lactone does not affect the safety or wholesomeness of meat or poultry products when used in prescribed amounts and for approved purposes, according to Lester M. Crawford, FSIS administrator. The agency ensures that all ingredients used in meat and poultry products are safe and wholesome and that the products are accurately labeled.

Lower Fat Allowed in Some Cooked Sausages. USDA now allows meat processors to substitute water for fat to reduce the fat in hot dogs, bologna, and other cooked sausages, providing there is no loss of nutritional value. The change in the regulations reflects USDA's desire to facilitate the marketing of lower fat products.

These products can be labeled with the terms "lite," "light," or "lower fat" if they contain at least 25 percent less fat than similar cooked sausage products. The labels, however, must include a comparison that explains the term. For example, the label for lower fat hot dogs might state: "This product contains 20



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percent fat, while USDA allows 30 percent fat in meat hot dogs."

Current inspection regulations for cooked sausages restrict fat to 30 percent and added water to 10 percent. Under the new rule, the combination of fat and added water cannot exceed 40 percent of the product weight. The maximum fat content will continue to be limited to 30 percent. However, the water restriction will be removed so that processors can substitute some of the water for fat to produce a lower fat product. The protein content will remain unchanged.

USDA Expands Repackaging and Relabeling Services. Poultry and poultry products inspected at Federal plants can be repackaged and relabeled at certain warehouses and distribution centers under the supervision of USDA inspection personnel. Repacking and relabeling operations allow bulk shipments of federally inspected products to be divided into consumer packages and be labeled with brand names.

Previously, poultry products could only be repacked and relabeled at federally inspected plants. All cutting and processing of poultry is still limited to federally inspected plants.

Warehouses and distribution centers are often more conveniently located than federally inspected plants. Allowing certain facilities to repackage and relabel poultry products with inspectors present means savings in time and money and a safe product, according to Lester M. Crawford. Crawford, FSIS administrator, said "the savings in transportation costs could ultimately mean lower prices for consumers."

Processors must pay USDA to have an inspector present during repackaging and relabeling operations. This optional

service has been available previously to the red meat industry, but there was no regulation allowing it for poultry products.

Mexican Fruits May Be Imported.

USDA now permits apples, grapefruits, oranges, peaches, and tangerines from certain areas in the state of Sonora, Mexico, to be imported without undergoing treatment for fruit flies. The designated areas of Sonora are free from five types of fruit flies that exist in other parts of Mexico. The fruit is still subject to all other pest treatments and procedures required by USDA. In addition, each box of fruit exported to the United States under this procedure must be clearly labeled with specific information about its origin.

Hot-Water Dip Allowed for Mexican Mangoes. USDA has revised its Plant Protection and Quarantine Treatment Manual to allow a hot-water dip as a pest treatment for imported Mexican mangoes. The manual contains procedures for treating regulated agricultural products. Mexican mangoes must be treated before being imported to destroy fruit fly species that do not exist in the United States.

James W. Glosser, APHIS administrator, states "Recent research indicates that except for the Mediterranean fruit fly, which is occasionally present in the state of Chiapas, a hot-water dip destroys all the fruit-fly species that exist in Mexico." Entry of mangoes from Chiapas is still prohibited.

About 65 percent of the mangoes consumed in the United States come from Mexico. Imported Mexican mangoes were previously fumigated with ethylene

dibromide, a treatment now banned by the Environmental Protection Agency.

USDA Changes Procedures for Imported Meat and Poultry Refused Entry. USDA changed its procedures for handling imported meat and poultry that is refused entry into the United States, because it failed to pass U.S. inspection. Import inspectors with FSIS will permanently mark all consignments that do not pass inspection "U.S. Refused Entry." The markings will be stamped on each carcass or on each packing unit. Products that are refused entry must be removed from the United States, converted to animal food, or destroyed. Previously, such products were identified with temporary placards and had to be closely monitored by USDA employees. The new regulation eliminates the requirement that products refused entry be sealed before transport within the United States, since the permanent marking will readily identify them.

The rule also reinstates the practice of "controlled pre-stamping." Under this procedure, import inspectors can have the "U.S. Inspected and Passed" mark put on imported products before the inspection has been totally completed. This procedure is especially useful at cold storage facilities, so that meat and poultry can be stamped, and samples taken for testing and inspection. If there are no problems, the products do not have to be handled again. If the products do not pass inspection, the inspectors can remove the marks from the containers and stamp them "U.S. Refused Entry." The use of pre-stamping makes inspection at crowded dock storage facilities more efficient and limits the amount of handling of the products. ■