



A Report to the Secretary on the Food Security Initiatives of the Food Safety and Inspection Service



Prepared by: 

Food Safety and Inspection Service

The Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food Safety
and Inspection
Service

Washington, D.C.
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January 31, 2003

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Administrator,
Food Safety and Inspection Service



The events of September 11, 2001 forever changed our world. Today, biological and chemical threats to our nation's food supply are a growing source of public concern. Since the terrorist attacks on America, security – including food security - has been the highest national priority.

For almost 100 years, FSIS has been active in assuring that our nation's food supply is among the safest in the world. Our long history of dealing with food emergencies has allowed FSIS to develop the expertise and systems to protect our nation's meat, poultry, and egg products supply against intentional and unintentional contamination. We have more than 7,600 inspection personnel who, on a daily basis, ensure the safety of meat, poultry, and processed egg products nationwide. Coupled with the resources of other government agencies at the Federal, State, and local levels, we have an extensive and highly effective system of protection in place.

Assuring the security of the food supply is a vital part of our public health mission. We take this responsibility seriously and have devoted many agency resources to ramping up our laboratory diagnostic capability, providing intensive training for our employees, and increasing our work force. We partner with other government agencies, the food industry, and consumer groups to ensure we are addressing real life concerns together.

FSIS will continue to look for ways to improve food safety. This includes improving surveillance systems for foodborne illnesses and identifying outbreaks more quickly, ensuring our risk reduction strategies are more science-based, and adjusting our workforce to support our increasingly science-based and public health oriented system.

This booklet details these ongoing efforts, including our work with our Federal agency partners, State governments, industry, and consumers. Together, I am confident we can have both the world's safest and most secure food supply.

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I. Why Is Food Security Important?

There are few moments over the course of recent modern history for which just about everyone remembers exactly where they were and what they were doing when it happened. Examples are the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and most recently, the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that fateful day transformed a horror previously confined to Hollywood fiction into a shocking new reality. But in this case, there were no actors, no actresses, and no viewers returning home and shutting out the horror that they had just seen on the big screen. Instead we all spent time dealing with this terrible reality in many different ways – consoling each other, grieving for the victims, and preparing for the unknown.

September 11th created the grim realization that our world can change in an instant. As President George W. Bush said, we are now engaged in a different kind of war – a war with an elusive enemy, no rules, no boundaries and no timeframe for when it will be over. This is truly an unconventional war. We realize now that many sectors of our society –

from energy to technology to agriculture – are vulnerable to attacks that inflict public harm and fear as well as undermine our economy.

Our safe and abundant food supply is a basic, yet fundamental component from which this country draws its prosperity. At FSIS, we have jurisdiction over products that generate more than \$120 billion annually in sales. This represents one third of all consumer spending on food.

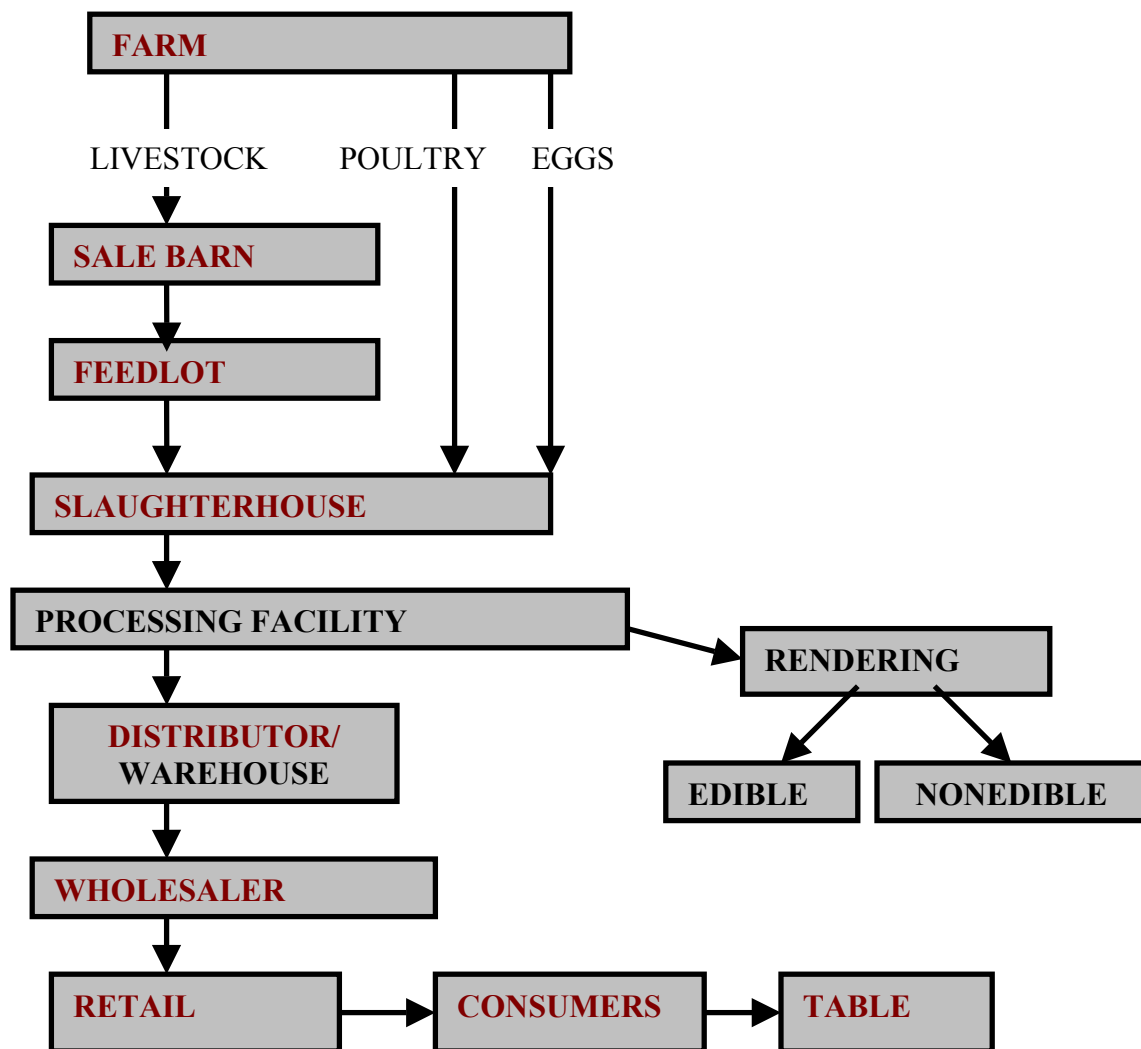
But what would happen if chemical agents or harmful bacteria were intentionally applied to any segment along the farm-to-table chain? Think of the hundreds of lives that would be affected by deliberate contamination, not to mention the widespread public fear and economic loss.

These are not just hypothetical issues that can be dismissed with the shrug of a shoulder. They need to be taken seriously, for the unconventional attacks on September 11th prove to us that anything is possible in the way of a potential terrorist strike. Detection and quick response are key to preventing an outbreak's domino-like effect on our society and economy.

We have already seen that terrorism can manifest through the food supply. An example is the 1984 incident in Dallas, Oregon. Members of a religious cult deliberately contaminated salad bars with the *Salmonella* serotype *typhimurium*. As a result, 751 people became ill. For a localized “attack” on the food supply, this caused a tremendous drain on medical resources and nationwide fear of a recurrence.

To ensure food safety, everyone along the farm-to-table continuum plays an integral part not only to reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses but also to prevent bioterrorist attacks. The extra care and attention taken all along this food continuum every day goes a long way in protecting millions of lives and our cherished freedoms.

The Food Process: Farm-to-Table



II. Food Safety and Inspection Service's Role In Ensuring Food Security

For nearly a century, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), a public health regulatory agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), has protected consumers by ensuring that meat, poultry, and egg products are safe, wholesome and accurately labeled. Preparing for emergencies plays an important part of that responsibility. Our long history of dealing with food emergencies has provided the necessary expertise to protect the food supply.

FSIS has more than 7,600 inspectors and veterinarians in more than 6,000 Federal meat, poultry, and egg product plants every day, and at ports-of-entry to prevent, detect, and respond to food safety emergencies. They routinely look for anything out of the ordinary. FSIS also works with State inspection programs to provide the same level of protection for meat, poultry, and egg products that fall under State jurisdiction.

The Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point system implemented in all Federal and State meat and poultry plants nationwide is designed to prevent entry of contaminated product into the food supply, whether the contamination is naturally occurring or introduced intentionally.

FSIS works closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as with State and local health agencies, to share information about illnesses. Additionally, FSIS participates in PulseNet, a national network of public health laboratories supported by the CDC. PulseNet performs DNA fingerprinting on foodborne bacteria, assists in detecting foodborne illness outbreaks and traces them back to their sources. It can also detect a linkage among sporadic cases. PulseNet, combined with epidemiology, has been fundamental in enabling Federal agencies to rapidly detect and control outbreaks of foodborne illness.

FSIS conducts ongoing public education about protections against foodborne illness. FSIS regularly communicates with consumers through continuing food safety education efforts, such as information on safe-handling and cooking practices. Consumers can also submit complaints related to meat, poultry, or egg products to the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline by calling 1-800-535-4555. FSIS field personnel investigate and report on all

consumer complaints submitted to the Hotline.

FSIS has a long history and expertise in protecting the U.S. food supply. Since September 11, 2001, the Agency has expanded its capabilities by focusing on products and the supply systems or the infrastructure of the food chain. FSIS has been enhancing the expertise of its employees, industry, and Federal and State partners. In other words, FSIS has taken numerous, dramatic steps during the last 16 months to ensure the security of the U.S. food supply.

FSIS District Office and Import Surveillance Liaison Inspector Locations



III. Food Safety and Inspection Service Response to Events of September 11, 2001

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has strengthened coordinated efforts to prevent, detect, and respond to food-related emergencies resulting from acts of terrorism. With a strong food safety infrastructure already in place, FSIS has been able to focus on fortifying existing programs and improving lines of communication both internally and externally. Through cooperation with industry, consumers and other government agencies, FSIS has an extensive system in place that, with enhancements completed and underway, can reduce the threat of, and properly respond to, a food security emergency.

Immediately after September 11, FSIS alerted inspectors to be aware of any suspicious activities in official establishments—that alert remains in effect today. FSIS also implemented a system for reporting such suspicious activities. However, FSIS realized that more needed to be done to address the infrastructure—the systems, the buildings, the people—that supports the supply of meat, poultry, and egg products, and food in general. FSIS enhancements are reflected in several initiatives conducted in support of U.S. Department of Agriculture

(USDA) initiatives or as separate initiatives to address FSIS' food security role.

The USDA has established several groups to focus on preventive and crisis response efforts. The USDA Homeland Security Council was created to coordinate Department efforts with the Department of Homeland Security. The Council established three subcouncils that provide coordination among mission areas and agencies within the Department. The only subcouncil with responsibility for the food supply, and that FSIS participates in, is the Protection of the Food Supply and Agriculture Production (PFSAP) subcouncil. PFSAP is co-chaired by the Under Secretary for Food Safety and the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs. FSIS also participates on a Departmental work group that is developing an Incident Command System to be used by all agencies within USDA.

FSIS is working closely with other agencies, including FDA, EPA, CDC, Department of Defense (DOD), and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) through the Food Threat Preparedness Network, or

PrepNet. The focus of this group is on prevention and response activities. The group is working on three areas: 1) emergency response; 2) laboratory capability; and 3) efforts aimed at prevention and deterrence. PrepNet is co-chaired by the Administrator of FSIS and the Director of the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition at FDA. FSIS is also working with the Association of Food and Drug Officials, FDA and the states to enhance its laboratory network and enable FSIS to quickly identify isolated cases, as well as outbreaks of foodborne illness.

The most visible action within FSIS was formation of the Food Biosecurity Action Team. This team has been instrumental in several initiatives to improve food safety and security. These include: 1) assessing potential vulnerabilities along the farm-to-table continuum; 2) strengthening FSIS coordination and cooperation with law enforcement agencies; 3) enhancing security features at all FSIS laboratories; 4) increasing the capacity of the agency's laboratories to test for additional food safety hazards and biological agents; and 5) providing guidelines to industry on food security and increased plant security. A

planned reorganization of FSIS is underway that includes a new homeland security office that will serve as a center for this team's functions.

Examples of other initiatives include biosecurity training for the field workforce and joint training with other agencies and participation in tabletop exercises at the Federal, State and local levels. FSIS has also implemented a national Consumer Complaint Monitoring System (CCMS)—a surveillance system that monitors and tracks food-related consumer complaints and is a powerful tool that can serve as a sentinel system for terrorist attacks on the food supply. In conjunction with F-BAT activities, FSIS has added one new District Veterinary Medical Specialist (DVMS) to each district office. One of the responsibilities of these individuals is to serve as points of contact on biosecurity issues at each office. As part of this effort, FSIS is coordinating emergency preparedness activities for the DVMS' with APHIS veterinarians. For example, the DVMS' are holding correlation meetings with veterinarians to enhance detection of foreign animal diseases.

IV. Food Safety and Inspection Service: Major Achievements in Food Security

Since September 11, 2001, FSIS' commitment to protect America's meat, poultry and egg supply from any form of intentional or unintentional contamination has never been higher. The Agency has made a large investment in time, energy, and resources directed at ensuring food security. The following achievements were major projects, which required much effort, but have substantially improved the security of the products FSIS regulates. Taken together, these achievements clearly reflect the Agency's current and ongoing commitment to food security.

- **Established the Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness (OFSEP)**

FSIS has created a dedicated, full-time staff whose sole responsibility is food security. The staff is headed by an assistant administrator who reports directly to the FSIS Administrator. The mission of the staff is to prevent or, if necessary, coordinate a response to any intentional attack on the food supply. The staff is comprised of two elements, an *External Relations and Emergency Preparedness Staff* and a *Scientific and Technical Support Staff*. The External Relations staff's primary responsibility is to develop and maintain the extensive network of

federal and state relationships necessary to mobilize for a food related emergency quickly and effectively. The Scientific staff provides science-based support for emergency response and prepares contingency plans for minimizing the risk to the safety and security of food sources as well as first responders.

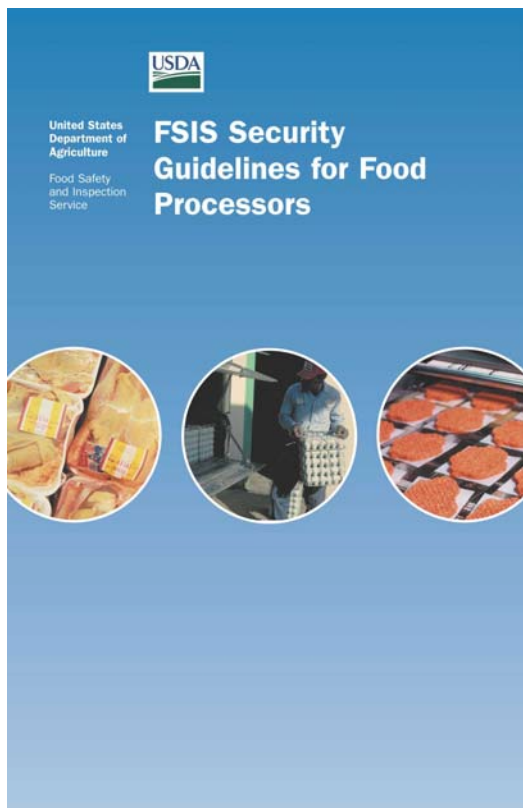
- **Prepared the FSIS Food Security Plan—FY 2003-2007**

FSIS developed a comprehensive, long-term plan to structure and guide the Agency's food security activities over the next five years. The overall goal of the plan is to "*Prevent the use of food as a terrorist weapon.*" The plan identifies the actions and resources necessary to achieve the goal and identifies who in the Agency is responsible for carrying out the specific actions. OFSEP prepares a quarterly report of accomplishments related to the plan and updates it on an annual basis.

- **Prepared and Distributed Security Guidelines for Food Processors**

The Agency prepared and distributed the *FSIS Security Guidelines for Food Processors* to assist Federal and State inspected plants that produce meat,

poultry and egg products in identifying ways to strengthen their biosecurity protection. The guidelines provide easy-to-understand techniques and methods that plant managers can utilize to increase their establishment's protection and security. FSIS also distributed the guidelines to its inspectors to assist plants that seek further clarification or advice. Additionally, the Agency worked closely with the Department to develop information materials for food producers, processors and meal providers to complement the security guidelines. These have also been distributed to Federal- and State-inspected plants. FSIS is currently developing security guidelines to target the transportation and distribution sectors of the food supply chain.



- **Increased Laboratory Capacity and Upgraded Security**

FSIS sought and received International Standards Organization (ISO) certification of all of its laboratories and completed an overall security upgrade. The Agency recently initiated construction on a new Biosecurity Level-3 laboratory and developed an extensive inventory of biological isolates housed and maintained at its laboratories. It also instituted Evidence Management procedures to assure proper chain of custody and other controls on all samples and materials received by the labs. The FSIS laboratories participate in the Laboratory Response Network, the CDC-sponsored system that provides training and microbiological methods to participating labs. FSIS labs also became participants in the Electronic Laboratory Exchange Network (eLEXNET) which is a system designed to provide a secure network in which food safety laboratories at various levels of government can share food sample and test data.

- **Launched All-Employee Food Security Training and Education**

FSIS has initiated a comprehensive two-year training and educational effort that is designed to reach every employee in the Agency. The main purpose of this effort is to ensure that each employee fully understands his

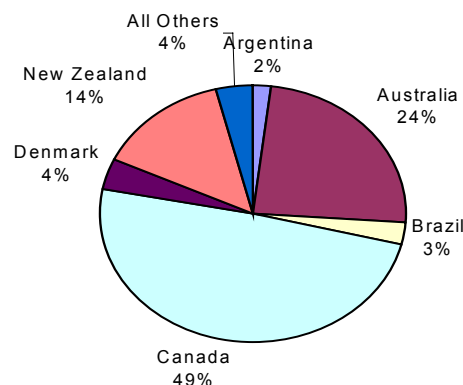
or her role and responsibility in preventing or responding to an attack on the food supply. The Agency also developed a videotape covering FSIS food security initiatives, emergency response procedures and guidelines for food processors for use in training all frontline supervisors. The videotape has also been shared with state and local partners and industry to address their biosecurity awareness and training needs. FSIS conducted an all employee meeting outlining the importance of food security for the Agency. Finally, the Agency is preparing an all employee handbook that will identify and discuss the potential threats to the food supply that might confront an FSIS employee and their expected response.

- **Enhanced Import Inspection**

Soon after the terrorist attacks on the United States, FSIS inspectors nationwide were placed on heightened

alert, a condition that remains in effect today. In addition, FSIS created a new position, that of import surveillance liaison inspectors. As of March of this year, the 20 new import inspectors will be on duty at port cities around the nation to augment the efforts of traditional FSIS import inspectors assigned to the 146 Import Houses in the country. Where traditional USDA import inspectors examine each shipment and conduct reinspection activities, these new import surveillance liaison inspectors will conduct a broader range of surveillance activities at each import facility, as well as extensive records review. These inspectors will not only improve the Agency's ability to ensure the safety of imported meat, poultry, and egg products, but as liaisons, they will also be able to improve the coordination with other agencies (e.g., U.S. Customs, APHIS) concerned with the safety of imported food products.

Imported Meat & Poultry Products--FY 2000
3,714,372,000 Pounds



- **Initiated a Federal-State Food Security Network Project**

The security of the food supply, like food safety, requires the effective, efficient, and coordinated efforts of Federal, State, and local agencies. The Federal-State Food Security Network will, like other similar networks, improve communications among food security agencies in food security events. A more important feature of the network is an inventory of assets that member agencies can bring to bear through prior agreements on an event, including acts of terrorism. The network will be particularly useful in multi-state food security events or terrorist acts where states will most likely be the first to respond and the first to require assets from other Federal and State agencies.

- **Assessed the Vulnerability of the Food Supply to Terrorist Attack**

FSIS has completed a risk assessment that is being used as a tool for determining the most vulnerable products, likely agents, and potential sites for deliberate adulteration of domestically produced meat, poultry, and egg products. Conclusions from this assessment will provide the

information needed to identify potential agents and processes that, if intentionally tampered with, could pose the most risk to the public. This information will also be used to develop strategies to reduce or eliminate a potential risk. The vulnerability assessment is currently being expanded to identify points in the production of imported products where biological, chemical, and radiological contaminants could be intentionally added to foods being brought into the United States.

V. Contacts

- Media Inquiries: (202) 720-9113
- Congressional Inquiries: (202) 720-3897
- Constituent Inquiries: (202) 720-8594
- Consumer Inquiries: Call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. The TTY number is 1-800-256-7072.
- Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness: (202) 720-5643
- FSIS Web site: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>
- To obtain copies of the *FSIS Security Guidelines for Food Processors*, go to: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/topics/biosecurity.htm> or call (202) 720-9113.