

FSIS Report Shows Food Safety Improvements

Control Procedures and Increased Testing Result From *Listeria* Interim Final Rule

The overall safety of ready-to-eat (RTE) meat and poultry products has improved in response to the *Listeria* interim final rule because establishments have strengthened their control procedures, increased testing and taken additional steps to eliminate the pathogen, according to a new government report.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) report, "Assessing the Effectiveness of the *Listeria monocytogenes* Interim Final Rule", which outlined the impact of the interim final rule and made recommendations for future actions, was released for public comment today. The deadline for comments is Jan. 31, 2005.

"Under the *Listeria* rule, ready-to-eat meat and poultry products are safer and public health is being better protected," Agriculture Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Elsa Murano said.

According to a USDA press release, the report was prepared by a 28-member FSIS assessment team, which evaluated and measured the effectiveness of the interim final rule, as well as the rule's effect on public health, consumer education as well as its economic impact. Implementation of the rule in small and very small plants and retail establishments was also assessed. The team made recommendations in such areas as inspector training, product sampling, retail food handling and communicating to small businesses.

The report found that many plants have made significant improvements such as adding antimicrobial ingredients to their product formulations to inhibit the growth of *Lm* and installing a post-processing treatment step to eliminate the pathogen. In addition, the report found that plants have either initiated or greatly increased their testing for *Listeria* or *Listeria*-like organisms on plant surfaces that come in contact with products after cooking.

American Meat Institute's Vice President of Scientific Affairs, Dr. Randall Huffman points out that the steady declines in *Listeria* prevalence on RTE meat and poultry products began some time ago. "These reductions have continued over the last decade due to aggressive steps by industry-enhanced equipment and facility design practices, research on new anti-microbial technologies, adoption of *Listeria* control best practices- and companies understanding the importance of sharing best practices regarding food safety."

FSIS is extending the comment period on the interim final rule to coincide with the close of the comment period on the report, Jan. 31, 2005. Comments should be submitted to: FSIS Docket Clerk, Docket #04-032N, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Room 102, Cotton Annex, 300 12th St., SW, Washington, DC 20250-3700.

The complete report is available at

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Oppde/rdad/frpubs/97-013F/LM_Assessment_Report_2004.pdf