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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains notices to the public of the proposed issuance of rules and regulations. The purpose of these notices is to give interested persons an opportunity to participate in the rule making prior to the adoption of the final rules.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

9 CFR Parts 309, 310, 381, and 417

[Docket No. 98-039N]

HACCP-Based Meat and Poultry Inspection Concepts: In-Plant Slaughter Inspection Models Study Plan

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is making available for comment a paper describing the plan for evaluating new livestock and poultry slaughter inspection models in certain establishments operating under Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems. The paper was prepared for use by establishments slaughtering certain market classes of animals and participating in the Agency's HACCP-Based Inspection Models project and by the FSIS project team. During this project, FSIS will test and evaluate new approaches to fulfilling inspection requirements by plants and FSIS inspectors. The project will also test new FSIS food safety and other consumer protection activities in transportation and distribution channels. The new models are intended to help the Agency determine how best to maintain and improve upon the level of protection provided by current inspection procedures, and at the same time use its resources more effectively. The paper outlines the approaches that will be used by the participating establishments and by the FSIS inspectors assigned to these plants. The paper also describes the organoleptic and microbiological evaluations to be conducted by the FSIS project team.

DATES: To receive full consideration, comments should be received by September 28, 1998.

ADDRESSES: The document "HACCP-Based Inspection Models Project: In-plant Slaughter" may be viewed in the FSIS Docket Room, Room 102 Cotton Annex Building, 300 12th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20250-3700. An electronic version of the document is available on-line at FSIS's homepage at "http://www.fsis.usda.gov." Written comments on the document may be sent in triplicate to FSIS Docket Clerk, DOCKET #98-XXXN, Room 102 Cotton Annex Building, 300 12th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20250-3700.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Patricia F. Stolfa, Assistant Deputy Administrator, Office of Policy, Program Development, and Evaluation, Food Safety and Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250-3700; (202) 205-0699.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

FSIS is conducting a project to develop and test new models for the inspection of certain meat and poultry products produced under the Agency's "Pathogen Reduction; Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point Systems" (PR/HACCP) final rule (61 FR 38806; July 25, 1996). FSIS will also test a new in-distribution inspection concept; however, the paper described here only concerns the in-plant slaughter phase of the project. The inspection models project was announced in a June 10, 1997, **Federal Register** notice, "HACCP-Based Meat and Poultry Inspection Concepts," requesting public comments on the design and development of new inspection models for slaughter and processing under HACCP systems of young, healthy, uniform animals (62 FR 31553). The project has been a subject of discussion at several public meetings during the past year.

The HACCP-Based Inspection Models project is intended to produce a flexible, more efficient, fully integrated system of oversight and controls. FSIS expects this system of establishment controls and Agency oversight and verification, to yield increased food-safety and other benefits to consumers. The new system should enable certain establishments to better meet their responsibilities under the PR/HACCP regulations and permit FSIS to deploy its inspection resources more effectively both in-plant and in-distribution.

In the inspection models for selected market classes that FSIS is developing, slaughter process control will be an industry responsibility subject to FSIS oversight and verification. The models, when refined, should enable FSIS to: (1) maintain and enhance the food-safety and other consumer protection benefits of the current carcass inspection system; (2) effectively and efficiently oversee, evaluate, and verify industry implementation of the PR/HACCP regulations; and (3) ensure that meat and poultry products are transported and distributed under conditions that will not render them adulterated. The project will thoroughly test the Agency's ability to achieve these objectives using the new models in certain market classes of livestock and birds.

Establishments participating in the project will carry out food-safety-related and other consumer protection activities. Establishment employees will conduct anatomical and pathological examinations of carcasses, and FSIS inspectors will oversee, evaluate, and verify the effectiveness and reliability of the establishments' slaughter process controls.

The paper "HACCP-Based Inspection Models Project: Inplant Slaughter" outlines the establishment process-control responsibilities and FSIS inspection activities to be carried out during the in-plant phase of the project, and describes the microbial and organoleptic evaluation procedures which the project team will carry out.

Done, at Washington, D.C., July 22, 1998.

Thomas J. Billy,
Administrator.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

9 CFR Parts 309, 310, 381, and 417

[Docket No. 98-009N]

HACCP-Based Meat and Poultry Inspection Concepts: Diseases and Conditions Identifiable During Post-Mortem Inspection

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for comments.