

Notices

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

[Docket No. 03–015N]

FSIS Safety and Security Guidelines for the Transportation and Distribution of Meat, Poultry, and Egg Products; Notice of Availability

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Availability; Request for public comments and information.

SUMMARY: The Food Safety and Inspection Service is announcing the availability of the Agency's current safety and security guidelines for the transportation and distribution of meat, poultry, and egg products. These guidelines were developed to assist facilities and shippers of all sizes to improve food safety and security in the handling of FSIS-regulated products. These guidelines include measures to improve food security during the loading, transport, in-transit storage, and unloading of meat, poultry, and egg products. In these guidelines, FSIS strongly recommends that shippers and receivers, as well as transporters, of these products develop controls for ensuring the security of products through all phases of distribution. Such controls are necessary to protect the products from intentional, as well as unintentional, contamination.

The Agency has decided to collect and analyze data on these transportation guidelines, which include both food safety and food security components, and determine whether there is a need to adopt any of these guidelines as regulations. Consequently, in this notice, FSIS is asking a series of questions about the transportation guidelines to solicit information from interested parties.

DATES: Submit written comments on the transportation guidelines and answers

to the questions to the FSIS Docket Room no later than October 3, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Submit one original and two copies of all written comments on the proposed transportation guidelines and responses to questions to: FSIS Docket Room, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Room 102, Cotton Annex, Washington, DC 20250–3700. All comments and responses received will be considered part of the public record and will be available for viewing in the Docket Room between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. Copies of the *FSIS Safety and Security Guidelines for the Transportation and Distribution of Meat, Poultry, and Egg Products* will also be available in the FSIS Docket Room between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays and on the Internet at: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/topics/transportguide.htm>. Printed copies of the Guidelines may be requested from the USDA FSIS Office of Congressional and Public Affairs, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Room 175, Washington, DC 20250–3700; telephone (202) 720–9113. These guidelines are available in both English and Spanish.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Perfecto Santiago, Assistant Deputy Administrator, Program Development Staff, Office of Policy and Program Development, Food Safety and Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250–3700; telephone (202) 205–0699 or fax (202) 401–1760.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

In May 2002, FSIS issued the *FSIS Security Guidelines for Food Processors* to assist Federal- and State-inspected meat, poultry, and egg product establishments in identifying ways to strengthen their food security protection. At that time, the Agency noted that it would continue to provide guidance to businesses engaged in the production and distribution of FSIS-regulated foods, and work with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other agencies to provide guidance for the handling of meat, poultry and egg products during transportation, distribution, and storage.

FSIS recognizes that food producers, transporters, and distributors have a

vested interest in making food security, as well as food safety, a top priority. FSIS will continue to seek input from stakeholders in developing guidance on food security and food safety matters. To ensure that the transporters and distributors of meat, poultry, and egg products have access to information to help them protect the food that they handle from threats, FSIS has developed the *FSIS Safety and Security Guidelines for the Transportation and Distribution of Meat, Poultry, and Egg Products*. These guidelines provide safety measures to prevent physical, chemical, or microbiological contamination of food products during transportation and storage, including measures that deal specifically with the prevention of intentional contamination due to criminal or terrorist acts.

Meat, poultry, and egg products are transported by air, sea, and land. Hazards may be present, or intentionally introduced, at any point during transportation and distribution, but are most likely to occur at changes between transportation modes and during loading and unloading. Meat, poultry, and egg products frequently are transported multiple times and often stored and further processed on their way to the consumer. These products could be exposed to hazards at each step in that process. For example, a product might be transported from a slaughter establishment to a raw-product processing establishment, next to a further processing plant, then to a distribution center, and finally to a retail market for purchase by the consumer.

The guidelines were developed to assist facilities and shippers of all sizes, as well as Federal, State, and local authorities, to improve food safety and security in the handling of FSIS-regulated products at every step in the transportation and distribution process.

While these guidelines are voluntary, and parties may choose to adopt measures suggested by many different sources, it is vital that all parties in the transportation and distribution process for meat, poultry, and egg products take steps to ensure the security of their operations, the integrity of their processes and products, and the continued safety of the products that they handle.

The first section of these guidelines provides food safety measures that are