

FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE

Statement of
Alfred V. Almanza, Administrator, Food Safety and Inspection Service
Before the
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Farr and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Alfred Almanza, Administrator of the Food Safety and Inspection Service. I appreciate the invitation to appear before you this morning about our programs and the ways we are supporting our Under Secretary's vision of improving public health through food safety.

As someone who started working on the slaughter line in a beef plant over 30 years ago, I know firsthand our employees are our greatest asset and strength. Whether located in slaughter establishments, laboratories, district offices or import houses throughout the country, we are united as "One Team with One Purpose:" that of protecting consumers from foodborne illness.

The high volume and the nature of the products that FSIS inspects demand an in-plant inspection presence. Therefore, FSIS inspection program personnel are present for all domestic slaughter

operations, inspecting each and every livestock and poultry carcass and each meat, poultry, and egg processing establishment at least once per shift.

During FY 2010, FSIS inspection program personnel ensured public health requirements were met in establishments that slaughter and/or process 147 million head of livestock and nine billion poultry carcasses. During FY 2010, inspection program personnel condemned more than 451 million pounds of poultry and more than 493,000 head of livestock during ante-mortem (before slaughter) and post-mortem (after slaughter) inspection.

In support of in-plant personnel in 6,200 Federally inspected establishments, FSIS employs a number of other field personnel, such as laboratory technicians and investigators. Program investigators conduct surveillance, investigations, and other oversight activities at food warehouses, distribution centers, retail stores, and other businesses that store, handle, distribute, transport, and sell meat, poultry, and egg products to the consuming public. These in-commerce businesses do not operate under grants of inspection and are not inspected on a daily basis by FSIS. However, the agency's oversight of FSIS-regulated products moving in consumer distribution channels is a vital part of our mission to protect public health.

Dr. Hagen and I know we are only as effective as our dedicated workforce. Just as they are committed to keeping America's food supply safe, we are committed to them. FSIS has effectively filled mission-critical positions at the agency, such as public health veterinarian

(PHV) positions. Between December 2009 and December 2010, the vacancy rate for PHVs declined by almost four percent, from 11.5 to 7.7 percent. And over the last two years, since December 2008, the PHV vacancy rate has decreased by almost eight percent, from 15.6 to 7.7 percent.

Ensuring that our employees have the tools to prevent foodborne illness has been one of Dr. Hagen's highest priorities as Under Secretary. I have directed a review of agency policies and practices to make sure these tools are focused on deterring the pathogens from contaminating the foods we regulate. With the additional insight and information the Public Health Information System will provide, our inspection force will have the most powerful tool yet to help us all fulfill our agency's mission. With so many tools in place it is not the agency's desire to create new laws or to impose further rules. Rather we seek to utilize the expertise of our workforce at FSIS to ensure that businesses can produce the safest products possible.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Farr, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your help in ensuring the safety of meat, poultry, and processed egg products and for the opportunity to testify before you today.