

FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE

Submitted for the Record

Statement of Dr. Barbara J. Masters, Acting Administrator, Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today as we discuss public health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) fiscal year (FY) 2005 budget request for the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

Infrastructure

FSIS has a long, proud history of protecting public health. Although the Agency under its current name was established by the Secretary of Agriculture on June 17, 1981, its history dates back to 1906. FSIS' mission is to ensure that meat, poultry, and egg products prepared for use as human food are safe, secure, wholesome, and accurately labeled. FSIS is charged with administering and enforcing the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA), the Egg Products Inspection Act (EPIA), and the regulations that implement these laws.

Ensuring the safety of meat, poultry, and egg products requires a strong infrastructure. To accomplish this task, FSIS has a large workforce of approximately 10,000 employees, most of who are stationed in the field, dedicated to inspection. In FY 2003, over 7,600 inspection personnel stationed in over 6,000 federally inspected meat, poultry, and egg products plants verified that the processing of 43.6 billion pounds of red meat, 49.2 billion

pounds of poultry, and 3.7 billion pounds of liquid egg products complied with statutory requirements. In addition, we re-inspected 3.8 billion pounds of imported meat, poultry and processed egg products from 28 of 33 countries that we determined have inspection systems equivalent to our own. Assuring that these products are safe and wholesome is a serious responsibility.

As you are well aware, these are compelling times in food safety, and it is because of your support that we are making real progress in improving the safety of the U.S. food supply. I would like to thank you for the past support you have given us in our budget requests. Now, I would like to tell you how we are fulfilling our responsibilities through FSIS' food safety vision and about our initiatives for better ensuring the safety of meat, poultry, and egg products.

Fulfilling the Vision

The continued mission of FSIS is to ensure that consumers have the safest possible food supply. To fulfill this vision, we have set out to continuously modernize FSIS' ability to improve the safety of meat, poultry, and egg products. Our efforts are paying off, as seen by the 16 percent decline in foodborne illness over the last six years. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) attributes these results in part to the implementation of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system in all meat and poultry plants in the United States. However, in spite of these positive trends towards a safer food supply, FSIS recognizes that intensified efforts are needed to reach the next

level of food safety. That is why the agency has diligently worked to carry out Dr. Murano's five core goals:

- To improve the management and effectiveness of our regulatory programs;
- To ensure that policy decisions are based on science;
- To improve coordination of food safety activities with other public health agencies;
- To enhance public education; and
- To protect FSIS regulated products from intentional contamination.

Improving the Management and Effectiveness of Regulatory Programs

In order for policies and programs to be successful, they must be uniformly and correctly applied. Thus, proper training of the workforce is essential. In addition, communication to field personnel needs to be timely and accurate, with proper supervision from the district and from headquarters in order to foster accountability in the system.

Training and Education

The key to improving the management and effectiveness of FSIS' considerable infrastructure is to ensure that the agency is well prepared with the tools necessary to protect the food supply. Training is a top priority of the agency. FSIS can only achieve its public health, food safety, and food security mission with adequate preparation of its workforce through scientific and technical training.

In April 2003, FSIS began the Food Safety Regulatory Essentials (FSRE). The goal of the training is to teach inspection personnel how to do their jobs properly, and emphasizes the

regulatory decision-making thought process both through lecture and workshop examples. In FY 2003, FSIS exceeded its goal to train 800 inspectors under FSRE. A comparison between pre-test and post-test scores has shown that the knowledge improvement of our inspectors has increased by an average of 20 percent. Feedback from our inspectors has been extremely positive, and industry representatives have noted the positive difference that these courses are having on how inspection procedures are performed.

FSIS has also initiated a comprehensive two-year training and education effort designed to ensure that every FSIS employee fully understands their role in preventing or responding to an attack on the food supply. Last year, over 1,600 employees received food security training. By the end of FY 2004, over half of our workforce will have received this training. The Law Enforcement Academic Research Network (LEARN), which is carrying out the training, has stated that this training effort is unparalleled in the Federal sector since it is being provided to such a broad base of our employees.

Another initiative the agency has undertaken to enhance FSIS' training effort is taking training opportunities closer to our employees. In August 2003, the agency announced new regional training centers designed to bring comprehensive workforce training programs to FSIS field employees throughout the country. FSIS has established the regional training centers in five field locations: Atlanta, GA; Dallas, TX; Philadelphia, PA; Des Moines, IA; and Boulder, CO. FSIS has hired three of the regional trainers to head the new centers, and expects to hire the remaining two trainers by April. In addition, FSIS will be providing distance learning that will be easily accessible to our field employees. These

approaches will allow FSIS to train more inspectors each year in various skills to enhance their technical and regulatory abilities.

Another step we've taken is to increase our cadre of scientifically trained personnel, known as Consumer Safety Officers (CSOs). CSOs have a scientific and technical background and receive additional FSIS training that enables them to use a disciplined methodology to assess and verify the design of food safety systems. FSIS has trained every entering CSO—150 of them—in a cooperative agreement through the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station. In FY 2004, the agency plans to train 200 additional employees who have been promoted to CSOs. In addition, the agency has extended CSO training to its Veterinary Medical Officers.

Accountability

FSIS inspection personnel are held accountable for ensuring that public health is protected. To emphasize the importance of accountability, FSIS created the Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement and Review (PEER) during the agency's recent reorganization. PEER serves as a quality control team by ensuring that FSIS functions, such as reviews of plants for compliance and food safety investigations, are carried out in a way most conducive to protecting the public health. PEER retains the role of ensuring prompt and appropriate enforcement of the inspection laws. The work of the field Program Investigators in PEER places them on a daily basis in close proximity to performance and compliance problems and concerns at the in-plant level, which affords the agency the ability to deal with necessary adjustments and problems in a much more immediate and

direct fashion than in the past. PEER was formed because a strong quality assurance program that uses reviews, evaluations, and audits as its tools can have a significant impact on management effectiveness, efficiency and policy development.

Because accountability is crucial in delivering programs in a consistent and effective manner, FSIS implemented the Humane Activities Tracking (HAT) program in February 2004. This new electronic tracking system will document inspection activities to ensure that livestock are humanely handled and slaughtered in federally inspected facilities. The HAT program will provide FSIS with more accurate and complete data on the time spent by FSIS personnel performing nine specific humane handling related tasks to ensure humane handling and slaughter requirements are met.

In addition, in November of 2003, FSIS issued an updated directive to all inspection personnel and district offices providing specific, detailed information about requirements of the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act to ensure that verification and enforcement requirements are clearly and uniformly understood. In May of 2003, FSIS also issued a directive to provide guidance and direction to inspection personnel to ensure consistent use of enforcement actions.

Ensure That Policy Decisions Are Based On Science

FSIS continuously reviews its existing authorities and regulations to ensure that emerging food safety challenges are adequately addressed. In addition, FSIS is committed to continuing its emphasis on the use of science, research, and technology in the development of improved food safety policies, focused on prevention whenever possible.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is one tool that can provide FSIS with the solid scientific foundation on which to base regulatory and policy decisions. In fact, the Agency has used risk assessment to estimate the likelihood of exposure to various hazards, and to estimate the resulting public health impact. For example, in February 2003, FSIS released a draft of a quantitative risk assessment conducted on *Listeria* in ready-to-eat (RTE) meat and poultry products. On February 26, 2003, FSIS held a public meeting to discuss the design of the risk assessment, the results, and conclusions that could be drawn from it regarding the risk of contamination of RTE products with this pathogen during processing.

The *Listeria* risk assessment, in conjunction with a previously released Food and Drug Administration (FDA)/FSIS risk ranking, peer review, and public comment, provided important data enabling FSIS on June 6 to publish a final *Listeria* rule originally proposed in early 2001. This risk-based regulation will serve as the cornerstone of the FSIS efforts to prevent listeriosis from RTE meat and poultry products. The rule requires all establishments that produce RTE products that are exposed to the environment after cooking to develop written programs to control *Listeria monocytogenes* and to verify the effectiveness of those programs through testing. Establishments must share testing data

and plant-generated information relevant to their controls with FSIS. The rule also encourages all establishments to employ additional and more effective *Listeria monocytogenes* control measures.

Innovative Testing Methods

In October 2003, FSIS announced the adoption of the BAX[®] system to screen for *Salmonella* in raw meat and poultry products. The Microbial Outbreak and Special Projects Laboratory, in collaboration with three FSIS field service laboratories, evaluated the BAX[®] system to determine whether it would be beneficial to the agency and to determine its validity and reliability. FSIS determined that the BAX[®] system was as sensitive as the existing method of detecting *Salmonella* in raw meat and poultry products, but also reduced the reporting time for negative samples by one to two days. FSIS has been using the BAX[®] screening system for *Salmonella* in ready-to-eat meat, poultry and pasteurized egg products since February 2003, and for *Listeria monocytogenes* since April 2002. This new measure increases efficiency in detecting pathogens and saves valuable agency time and resources.

Reducing *E. coli* O157:H7

FSIS has instituted major changes in its *E. coli* O157:H7 policy to further ensure that beef plants address and reduce the presence of *E. coli* O157:H7. In October 2002, the agency took strong steps to address *E. coli* O157:H7 contamination based on USDA's Agricultural Research Service's data and FSIS' draft risk assessment. Those measures are starting to pay dividends to the American consumer. Our scientifically trained personnel have

examined prevention mechanisms at more than 1,000 beef establishments and a majority of those plants have made major improvements based on reassessments of their HACCP plans. As a result, we are seeing a drop in the number of *E. coli* O157:H7 positive samples in ground beef. For instance, in *E. coli* O157:H7 samples collected and analyzed during 2003, 0.30 percent tested positive, compared to 0.78 in 2002 – or a 62% reduction.

Improve Coordination of Food Safety Activities with Other Public Health Agencies

With primary authority over meat, poultry, and egg products, FSIS plays an integral role in ensuring the safety of America's food supply. As one partner in the U.S. food safety effort, FSIS strives to maintain a strong working relationship with its sister public health agencies. Cooperation, communication, and coordination are absolutely essential if we are to be effective in addressing public health issues.

BSE Coordination

The December 2003 discovery of a single case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in Washington State provides an excellent example of the strong communication ties and the cooperation between USDA and its Federal and State food safety partners. The Federal government's swift and substantial reaction to the BSE diagnosis played a vital role in maintaining high consumer confidence. FSIS and its sister agencies moved effectively and forcefully upon the discovery of a BSE case in this country, further strengthening already formidable BSE preventive measures. Being a part of the continuous briefings, planning meetings, international trade discussions, and all the other events surrounding this situation has been both challenging and rewarding. FSIS has worked

closely with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and other mission areas in USDA, FDA, state governments, industry and consumers to ensure our BSE prevention and response measures are fully effective in the United States.

MOU with FDA

Since 1999, FSIS and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to exchange information on an on-going basis about establishments that fall under both jurisdictions. FSIS will continue engaging in substantive discussions with FDA and other agencies who share public health and food safety responsibilities. The Bioterrorism Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-188) further enhanced this cooperation by authorizing FDA to commission FSIS employees to conduct inspection at dual jurisdiction facilities.

Public Health Service Commissioned Corps Officers

In addition to its partnerships with the White House and Federal agencies, FSIS has entered into a working relationship with the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) and the Office of the Surgeon General. In April 2003, FSIS signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Surgeon General and the PHS that allows expanded numbers of PHS Commissioned Corps Officers to be detailed to the agency. FSIS currently has 19 PHS Commissioned Corps Officers detailed to the agency and will incorporate additional PHS Officers nationwide across all program areas under the agreement. Not only will these officers help FSIS respond to foodborne disease outbreaks and assist in preventing foodborne illness, but they will assist in the agency's homeland security efforts as well.

Since the Commissioned Corps Officers are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, this affords a greater flexibility to respond immediately during heightened security alerts or an actual threat to the food supply.

USDA's Unified Food Safety Research Agenda

Another example of FSIS' commitment to communication, cooperation, and coordination was the November 2003 announcement of a unified food safety research agenda to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of food safety programs. USDA also released a list of additional research needs specific to meat, poultry and egg products that FSIS will encourage non-governmental entities to address. The government research agenda will complement these efforts by industry and academia. USDA's Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area worked with USDA's Office of Food Safety, other government food safety agencies, and stakeholders to develop the unified research agenda. The unified agenda prioritizes research needs and maximizes use of available resources.

Enhance Public Education Efforts

Because everyone has a responsibility for food safety, educating the public about this responsibility is a crucial element in FSIS' food safety mission. All food preparers, from consumers to food service employees, must know and understand basic safe food-handling practices. These efforts must be broad enough to ensure that no segment of the public is uninformed about safe food handling practices, yet at the same time, target various segments of the population to positively influence those behaviors that pose the greatest potential risk. Communicating with the public about food safety must be accomplished in a

manner that is easily understandable so that it is useful to every segment of the population. Thus, FSIS has considered innovative and collaborative methods for delivering the food safety message.

The Food Safety Mobile

One such innovative way of spreading the food safety message is USDA's Food Safety Mobile, which was introduced in March 2003. This eye-catching "food safety educator-on-wheels" brings food safety information to consumers and builds on our partnerships in communities across the country. Through the Food Safety Mobile, FSIS is sharing its food safety message with the general public as well as culturally diverse and underserved populations and those with the highest risk from foodborne illnesses. From March to November 2003, the Mobile traveled over 24,000 miles and participated in 87 events in 64 cities across the country. These events ranged from county fairs and grocery store demonstrations, to the Taste of Minnesota and the Philadelphia Thanksgiving Day Parade. FSIS used these opportunities to provide information and publications on food safety to approximately 179,000 people face-to-face at Mobile events. FSIS estimates 64.4 million media impressions from the Mobile, and that does not include internet exposure.

Educational Campaign

FSIS has also been conducting an educational campaign through public events and media interviews with national and regional media organizations in order to reach more of the population with important public health messages. Recent events were held in Houston, Philadelphia, Portland, San Francisco, Miami, and the Flathead Reservation in Montana.

National television interviews have been conducted with major television networks, including *Fox News*, *Telemundo* and *Univision*. National celebrities, such as former Miss America Heather Whitestone McCallum, pop music legend Olivia Newton-John, and country singer Wynonna Judd, have also been recruited to help FSIS reach even larger audiences with food safety messages through special events and the filming of Public Service Announcements (PSA). The results have been impressive. The Heather Whitestone McCallum PSA has aired 14,448 times since September 2003. This PSA ranked in the top 3% of all PSA's shown during the month of January 2004 along with PSA's by the American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline

USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline is an additional tool that FSIS uses to share its food safety message. The Hotline handled over 98,000 calls and 80 media and information multiplier calls during FY 2003. Calls included requests from newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and book authors, and included live interviews with radio and television stations. The Hotline also provides recorded information and live assistance for our Spanish-speaking callers. Additionally, the Hotline was a key resource for keeping the public informed about the BSE situation in Washington and has handled approximately 4,000 calls and 1,000 emails concerning BSE since December 23, 2003.

Protect Meat, Poultry, and Egg Products Against Intentional Contamination

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, there is recognition that threats to the well being of the Nation's citizens can come in the form of terrorist attacks, including the intentional contamination of food. With a strong food safety infrastructure already in place, FSIS has been focusing on fortifying existing programs and improving internal and external lines of communication. By partnering with other agencies, including CDC, FDA, USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), DHS, APHIS, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as international partners such as the Canadian and Mexican governments' food inspection agencies, and State and local health agencies, FSIS is in a pivotal position to share information and to strengthen critical infrastructure protection activities concerning food from farm to table.

FSIS Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness

To date, FSIS has undertaken a number of initiatives to protect meat, poultry, and egg products from the potential of a terrorist attack. Immediately following September 11, 2001, FSIS established the Food Biosecurity Action Team (F-BAT). The charge of F-BAT was to coordinate all activities related to biosecurity, counter-terrorism, and emergency preparedness within FSIS. These activities are coordinated with USDA's Homeland Security Council, other government agencies, and industry. Currently, FSIS' newly created Office of Food Security and Emergency Preparedness (OFSEP) has assumed the responsibilities of F-BAT and serves as the centralized office within FSIS for food security issues.

OFSEP interacts closely with USDA's Homeland Security Council and represents the agency on all food security matters throughout the Federal government, as well as in State and local activities. The Office's mission is to lead in the development of the agency's infrastructure and capacity to prepare for, prevent, and respond to, deliberate attacks or other threats to the U.S. food supply. As the lead coordinator and primary point of contact on all food security and emergency preparedness activities within FSIS, OFSEP focuses primarily on:

- Emergency preparedness and response;
- Federal/State/Industry Relations;
- Continuity of operations (COOP);
- Scientific expertise in chemical, biological, and radiological terrorism; and,
- Security clearance and safeguarding classified information.

To ensure coordination of these activities involves all program areas of the agency, OFSEP established a new standing advisory group, the Food Security Advisory Team (FSAT), comprised of representatives of the major program areas within FSIS, to provide program-specific technical support.

Expanding Coordination with Federal, State, and Local Agencies

FSIS collaborates and coordinates closely with its State partners to ensure an effective prevention and response program. Some of the many state organizations FSIS works with include the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO); the Association of State and

Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO); and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA). Most recently, FSIS teamed with FDA in cosponsoring a joint meeting between ASTHO and NASDA, entitled “*Homeland Security: Protecting Agriculture, the Food Supply, and Public Health – The Role of the States.*” The purpose of this meeting was to enhance collaboration between State public health and agriculture agencies and the Federal government. Both the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) were on hand for this joint meeting.

FSIS also works closely with the White House Homeland Security Council, DHS, FDA, and the USDA Homeland Security Staff to develop strategies to protect the food supply from an intentional attack. For example, FSIS, along with FDA and industry partners, is working with DHS to establish a new food information sharing and analysis activity for the food sector. This public/private partnership will aid in the protection of the critical food infrastructure by centralizing the information about threats, incidents, and vulnerabilities.

Consumer Homeland Security Education

Because everyone has a stake in a safe and secure food supply, FSIS published *Food Safety and Food Security: What Consumers Need to Know* in November 2003, as part of the agency’s continuing effort to protect public health by preventing and responding to contamination of the food supply throughout the farm-to-table continuum. The brochure, developed by FSIS, is available in both English and Spanish. In a concise and easy-to-follow format, *Food Safety and Food Security: What Consumers Need to Know*, lays out comprehensive and practical information about safe food handling practices, foodborne

illness, product recalls, keeping foods safe during an emergency and reporting suspected instances of food tampering. This publication is the latest in a series of food security guidelines issued by FSIS that includes *FSIS Security Guidelines for Food Processors* and *FSIS Safety and Security Guidelines for the Transportation and Distribution of Meat, Poultry and Egg Products*.

Ensuring the Safety of Imports

To further strengthen our import inspection program, we established a new position called the import surveillance liaison inspector, using funds provided in the FY 2001 Homeland Security Supplemental Appropriations Act. These inspectors augment the current activities of traditional import inspectors at locations across the country. The import surveillance liaison inspectors conduct a broader range of surveillance activities, and they coordinate with other agencies, such as the APHIS, FDA, and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection within the DHS. Currently, 20 of these new inspectors are on board, and we anticipate more will be added.

Laboratories

Laboratories play a key role in our ability to quickly detect contamination of the food supply. FSIS has four ISO accredited laboratories—three regulatory laboratories that conduct testing on samples of meat, poultry and egg products, and a fourth laboratory that focuses on microbial outbreaks. FSIS has increased security at all of our laboratories. This includes instituting procedures to ensure proper chain of custody and other controls on all samples and materials received by the labs. The labs participate in the Electronic

Laboratory Exchange Network (eLEXNET), which is a system designed to provide a secure network in which food safety labs at various levels of government can share test data on food samples.

Furthermore, FSIS laboratories have enhanced analytical capability for compounds of concern and developed surge capacity. Our four labs have expanded capability to test for non-traditional microbial, chemical and radiological threat agents. In addition, the Agency has also begun construction of a Bio Security Level 3 facility that will be able to conduct analyses on a larger range of potential bioterrorism agents.

FSIS is also represented on the interagency Laboratory Response Network and has worked to develop the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) for potential foodborne contamination incidents. FERN was formed in 2002 and currently has about 61 members, including FSIS, FDA, and state labs. Participation is open to Federal, state, and local government labs that are capable of conducting food testing and forensic analysis for a wide variety of chemical, biological and radiological agents. FERN can help respond to national emergencies, including terrorist threats that might affect the food supply. In FY 2005, FSIS plans to significantly expand its participation in FERN.

FY 2005 Budget Request

I appreciate having the opportunity to discuss a number of FSIS' accomplishments with you. Now I would like to present an overview of the FY 2005 budget request for FSIS.

Implementation of these budget initiatives is imperative to helping us attain FSIS' public health mission. In FY 2005, FSIS is requesting a program level of \$951.7 million, a net increase of about \$61 million from the enacted level for FY 2004. Under current law, we are requesting an appropriation of \$838.7 million, with an additional \$113 million in existing user fees.

Supporting FSIS' Basic Mission

The FSIS budget request for FY 2005 supports the Agency's basic mission of providing continuous food safety inspection in each meat, poultry, and egg products establishment in the U.S. The FY 2005 budget includes \$15.5 million in increases for mandatory pay raises in Federal and State programs. This includes annualization of the calendar year 2004 pay raise, as well as the anticipated calendar year 2005 pay raise.

The FY 2005 budget request includes a \$17.3 million increase for the full cost of in-plant inspection and enforcement of humane handling and slaughter. FSIS employee salary, benefits, and inspector travel between plants make up a large portion of the FSIS budget and have a serious affect on our ability to staff plants if not fully funded. Thus, FSIS requires a \$12.3 million increase to avoid detrimental employment restrictions within the agency, which would result if unavoidable cost increases are not fully funded and must be absorbed. An additional \$5 million is requested so that FSIS' inspection workforce can continue its strict enforcement of regulations for humane slaughter and handling of livestock, a top priority at FSIS.

New Initiatives

The FY 2005 request includes a \$33.6 million increase for new initiatives that support the Department's goals for FSIS.

BSE Surveillance

First, the FY 2005 budget request includes an increase of \$3 million for BSE surveillance. FSIS' BSE inspection program will add permanent BSE control measures in FY 2005, which include: increased in-plant verification of slaughter plant designs for controlling specified risk materials (SRMs), overtime inspection, and travel for Veterinary Medical Officers to test non-ambulatory disabled livestock when they arrive at small slaughter plants that do not have a resident veterinarian. FSIS will also perform about 60,000 screening tests in FY 2005 at processing plants that use advanced meat recovery (AMR) equipment, to ensure that SRMs do not enter the food supply.

Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative

The FY 2005 budget also requests a \$23.5 million increase to support a food and agriculture defense initiative in partnership with USDA, HHS, and DHS. Food contamination and animal and plant diseases and infestations can have catastrophic effects on human health and the economy. The three Federal Departments involved are working together to create a comprehensive food and agriculture policy that will improve the government's ability to respond to the dangers of disease, pests and poisons, whether natural or intentionally introduced. Our food and agriculture defense initiative has five components:

- Biosurveillance;
- The Food Emergency Response Network;
- Data systems to support the Food Emergency Response Network;
- Enhancing FSIS laboratory capabilities; and
- Follow-up bio-security training.

First, the food and agriculture defense initiative will allow FSIS to participate in an interagency biosurveillance initiative that would improve the Federal government's ability to rapidly identify and characterize a potential bioterrorist attack. Funding this initiative will improve Federal surveillance capabilities and enable FSIS to integrate with DHS to compile FSIS surveillance information rapidly with threat information. This funding would also allow FSIS to focus its resources on the vulnerable products and processes identified during the agency's vulnerability assessments of imported and domestic products; increase regulatory sampling for three additional threat agents; add five Import Surveillance Liaison Inspectors, 30 program investigators for transportation, distribution, and retail surveillance, and two Public Health and Epidemiology Liaison Officers to our workforce; and establish a Foodborne Disease Surveillance Communication system to coordinate with DHS systems.

The second component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN), which I discussed earlier. A nationwide laboratory system with sufficient capacity to meet the needs of anticipated emergencies is integral to any bioterrorism surveillance and monitoring system. The goal is to establish

100 FERN laboratories, creating a network of Federal, State and local laboratories that FSIS could call upon to handle the numerous samples that would be required to be tested in the event of a terrorist attack on the meat, poultry or egg products supply. The FY 2005 budget request would expand FERN to contract with State and local laboratories, and to establish five regional hubs and a National Operating Center to coordinate FERN's efforts and conduct training. In addition, FSIS would also fund the establishment of five to seven State laboratories for screening of microbiological agents, with more laboratories in the future, based on the availability of funds.

The third and fourth components of the food and agriculture defense initiative provide further support to FERN. The electronic laboratory exchange network (eLEXNET), which I mentioned previously, is a national, web-based, electronic data reporting system that allows analytical laboratories to rapidly report and exchange standardized data. The FY 2005 budget request would provide funding needed to make eLEXNET available to additional FERN and other food-testing laboratories nationwide. In turn, the budget request would enhance FSIS' laboratory capabilities in order to detect new bioterror-associated agents, and to ensure FSIS' capability and capacity to perform the toxin and chemical testing that will be standardized across all FERN laboratories.

Because the realm of biosecurity is ever changing, FSIS must provide its workforce with the most up-to-date information necessary to ensure that meat, poultry, and egg products are protected from intentional contamination. Therefore, the final component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is follow-up biosecurity training of the workforce. This

additional training is essential as part of the ongoing effort to protect the public by educating the workforce regarding the latest threat agents and countermeasures to those agents.

Training and Education

Training is a top priority at FSIS. Our inspection workforce is our greatest asset, and this is why FSIS is dedicated to establishing and maintaining a comprehensive and fully integrated training program. The agency is continuing its extensive training effort by requesting approximately \$7.1 million, or an increase of 50% over FY 2004, to train all new inspection personnel and to expand existing training programs in FY 2005.

To ensure that newly hired inspection personnel receive the proper orientation and training to perform their jobs when they report to duty, FSIS is requesting approximately \$4 million in FY 2005. The agency has been criticized in the past for not immediately training all new employees. This initiative will provide the formal training needed to ensure that inspection procedures are performed consistently and appropriately under agency policies. This initiative will also enable FSIS to place 10 district trainers, in addition to five already funded in the agency's baseline, throughout the nation, to orient and train FSIS employees.

Last year, FSIS began retooling and expanding its existing training programs by incorporating a public health focus and integrating scientific and technical principles with training on technical and regulatory approaches to inspection. Through the \$3.1 million requested by FSIS in FY 2005, the agency would continue to provide Food Safety

Regulatory Essentials (FSRE) training to field employees, including food inspectors, CSOs, Inspectors-in-Charge, and Compliance Officers. The agency will offer the training regionally to accommodate inspection staff. Additional computer-based-training will be provided to implement the training, and will be catered to the inspection personnel's specific food safety responsibilities.

User Fee Proposal

Under current law, in 2005 FSIS estimates it will collect \$113 million in annual user fees to recover the costs of overtime, holiday, and voluntary inspection. FSIS' FY 2005 budget includes a legislative proposal to recover the costs of providing inspection services beyond an approved eight-hour primary shift. The proposal was submitted to Congress last August. If enacted, the level of appropriated funds needed would be reduced by an estimated \$124 million, making the FSIS budget request \$714.7 million. This will result in significant savings for the American taxpayer.

Closing

The goals and initiatives that FSIS has laid out as its vision represent a monumental task. But let me assure you; this is a task that we are ready and willing to take on. I believe that with the appropriate support, FSIS will be able to achieve its public health vision and strengthen the safety of meat, poultry, and egg products.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. Thank you for your continued support. Thank you also for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Subcommittee on how FSIS is working with Congress and other partners to achieve its public health vision.