

# Alliance Alert

A food industry organization devoted to food safety and public health



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From left: James Denton, John Marcello, Mark Thomas, Rita Fullem and Joe Harris at the May 8 board meeting.

## Alliance Board Approves Two HACCP Training Curriculum

The International Meat and Poultry HACCP Alliance has approved two HACCP training courses — "Introductory HACCP" and "Executive HACCP Seminar" — that training entities can teach. At the May 8 board meeting, the board also considered guidelines to accredit HACCP programs, setting standards for course curriculum and instructors.

"The board decided in the spring to proceed with an accreditation program instead of a certification program since USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service does not require certification in its proposed HACCP regulation," said Alliance

Executive Director **H. Russell Cross**. The Alliance has focused its resources on developing an accreditation program that will help standardize training and education and ensure that Alliance-accredited training meets FSIS requirements.

The three-day "Introductory HACCP" course is designed to review the philosophy and principles of HACCP and to teach participants how to implement HACCP in meat and poultry operations.

The "Executive HACCP Seminar" is a half-day course designed to review the seven HACCP principles and the value of

HACCP as a management priority.

### Accreditation Program

As a service to its members, the Alliance plans to accredit programs that teach Alliance-approved courses. Only Alliance members will be able to

receive this accreditation, said Accreditation (formerly Certification) Committee co-chair **Bill Brown**, Southeast Meat Association.

"To achieve our goal of standardized training, we are in the final stages of establishing an Alliance Accreditation program to make sure training courses, materials and instructors meet certain criteria," Brown said. "Furthermore, accreditation will bring credibility, consistency and value to Alliance members who provide approved training and to the companies and officers who receive approved training."

The Accreditation Committee proposed that programs would receive a two-year accreditation, with any proposed changes to the training program receiving approval from the committee.

### Next Alliance Board Meeting: September 20, Chicago

Mark your calendars—the next Alliance board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 20, at the National Live Stock and Meat Board's office in Chicago (444 N. Michigan Avenue). The meeting will be held prior to the American Meat Institute's annual trade show and convention. On the agenda will be election of officers, approval of additional training curriculum, budget approval, and committee reports.

## A Word With Russell Cross



The HACCP Alliance will be 1½ years old at the fall board meeting, September 20, in Chicago. The Alliance has already accomplished many activities since March 1994 when an idea became a reality. Not only did we formalize the Alliance, establish bylaws, and determine our board structure, but we also made headway in developing Alliance training programs.

We've put into place a curriculum review process and approved two HACCP training courses. A preliminary accreditation program is being finetuned for day-to-day implementation and administration. The accreditation program is a benefit to members because it will help guarantee industry-wide consistency and standardization in HACCP implementation.

We've provided members with resources and technical guidance on the proposed FSIS regulations for mandatory HACCP. We've sponsored scientific symposia and attended government meetings on HACCP, on-farm food safety systems, and microbiological standards. We've also authored articles for trade and general publi-

cations about HACCP and its role in food safety. Soon, HACCP and food safety information will be available to anyone through the Internet and World Wide Web.

While we've made important strides in accomplishing Alliance goals, the realistic implementation of HACCP into many meat and poultry operations is still years away.

Training, education, research and communications will remain the cornerstones of the Alliance.

Alliance members are encouraged to attend the fall meeting and help chart the organization's activities for the coming year. New officers will be elected. Priorities will be established. Given the overwhelming interest in

inspection reform and the universal support for HACCP as a common-sense approach and foundation for food safety, the Alliance will continue to play an

important role in helping prepare the industry for the changes to come. I encourage you to be a part of it. It will take all of us working together to meet our goals.

## FSIS Holds On-Farm HACCP Forum

On-farm pre-harvest food safety programs should be based on good science, with a current focus on HACCP systems for controlling chemical and physical hazards and with a longer-term goal of including pathogen reduction measures as the science becomes available. This was the consensus of numerous meat and poultry industry representatives and researchers at the National Forum on Animal Production Food Safety, May 23-25.

Industry programs for chemical avoidance, quality assurance and total quality management will serve as an excellent starting point for developing HACCP programs for controlling chemical and physical hazards in pre-harvest operations. But the consensus at the meeting is a HACCP system for microbiological hazards cannot be developed yet because there is such a large information gap about the epidemiology, environmental conditions and ecological considerations surrounding pathogens in livestock production.

The group also recommended that on-farm HACCP systems should be voluntary, not federally-mandated; on-farm microbiological research needs to be better coordinated; and that federal research should have a broadened peer review.

FSIS hosted the forum to develop "innova-

tive and collaborative strategies for enhancing food safety at the animal production stage." Acting Under Secretary for Food Safety Michael Taylor emphasized that while the agency has a clear-cut regulatory strategy for reducing hazards within meat and poultry plants, FSIS does not seek the kind of direct regulatory relationship with animal producers that it has with processors and packers.

Several participants reiterated the need for HACCP to be implemented from farm to table. The end result and ultimate benefit from implementing HACCP is a reduction in pathogens and safer food. If on-farm HACCP systems are put in place, but then product becomes recontaminated as it moves through the food chain, then no benefits are realized — yet the cost to producers is still very real. Benefits to consumers must be real if costs are to be accepted by producers, participants said.

FSIS plans to publish the proceedings of the forum and participate in future meetings designed to develop HACCP programs for pre-harvest on-farm operations. The agency is considering hosting regional forums to allow more producers to participate in the development of programs that embrace HACCP. Contact FSIS' Margaret Webb, 202/690-1279, for a copy of the proceedings.

## Microbiological Testing Limited

Microbiological testing as a means for determining the microbiological safety of a lot of food has severe limitations for consumers, government regulators and industry, reports **Dr. Gary Acuff** of Texas A&M University's Center for Food Safety.

Acuff was one of six FSIS-invited speakers at the May 1-2 conference entitled "The Role of Microbiological Testing in Verifying Food Safety" in Philadelphia. He explained the concept of lot acceptance testing and its value in end-product testing versus use as a verification tool in HACCP programs. Referring to the microbiological sampling plan as defined in FSIS' proposed mandatory HACCP regulation, Acuff said that the end-product sampling program will be of limited usefulness to consumers and government regulators because the sampling will not reliably detect unacceptable processes, and that the sampling program will not support the industry because it will, with high frequency, label a compliant process as unacceptable. Acuff stressed the importance of using microbiological testing for verification at critical control points rather than emphasis on end-product testing.

## News Briefs

### Marketing HACCP To Consumers

A somewhat unconventional marketing campaign focusing on HACCP is underway at a prominent grocery store in Texas. H-E-B's flagship Central Market store in Austin, Texas, promotes in its monthly newsletter and newspaper advertisements its storewide HACCP system. The store focuses primarily on its seafood department, noting that Central Market is the "first Texas retailer to be approved by the U.S. Department of Commerce to implement the rigorous seafood inspection and safety program known as HACCP..."

The Central Market newsletter also reminds its customers that "food quality and food safety go hand in hand." To illustrate the company's commitment to safety, the newsletter promotes its training requirements for managers and employees, inspections by checkers for damaged food products, proper cooking procedures followed for its prepared foods, and supplier prerequisites.

This HACCP marketing campaign is a direct attempt by a major grocer to promote food safety to its customers. While the Alliance Marketing and Communications Committee is currently focusing on educating members and others in the food industry about HACCP and its implementation, the committee will also consider long-term, consumer marketing recommendations.



## Seafood HACCP Alliance

The Seafood HACCP Alliance, which was established in June 1994, met June 21-22 at the Sheraton Plaza in Orlando, Fla., to review the final version of HACCP training curriculum for the seafood industry. The Seafood Alliance is working with the National Sea Grant Program, National Fisheries Institute, National Food Processors Association, Association of Food and Drug Officials, Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference, Food and Drug Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop a training curriculum addressing seafood and aquaculture commerce for regulatory and industry employees.

Regional AFDO affiliates are selecting individuals to serve as HACCP trainers for a "train the trainer" program. The Seafood Alliance plans to offer "train the trainer" and industry training programs this fall.

Even though the Food and Drug Administration's final HACCP rule for the seafood industry is still pending, the industry is moving forward to train employees in anticipation of the HACCP program.

To identify opportunities for collaboration and information sharing, Alliance Associate Director **Dr. Kerri Harris** will serve as the liaison to the Seafood HACCP Alliance, which is coordinated by Dr. Steve Otwell of the University of Florida, 904/392-1991.

### HACCP in the EU

By the end of the year, all food companies in the European Union will be required to have in place an effective HACCP system, as a result of a directive passed in June 1993.

The directive states that all companies — from international food companies to small businesses such as bakers and caterers — must apply HACCP principles to their operations.

According to trade journal reports, EU countries are wrestling with how to integrate HACCP into ISO 9000 standards. HACCP offers the food industry a set of guidelines for process control, while ISO 9000 stipulates specific requirements for implementing HACCP. In summary, industry onlookers suggest that integration of the HACCP process control system and the ISO quality management system offers the best basis for optimum business operations.

# Bringing Food Safety Information To Every Home--Via Computer

The International Meat and Poultry HACCP Alliance is establishing a World Wide Web "home page" or central resource location for HACCP information on the Internet.

According to Kerri Harris, Associate Director, the goal is to provide "one stop on the information superhighway" where people can obtain food safety information.

The Alliance will identify and place existing research findings,

information about ongoing research, and general information



about food safety on the Alliance's home page.

With research reports and information in one location, it will

be easier for Alliance members to track trends, such as emerging pathogens. It will also help inform and educate consumers about HACCP and other food safety issues.

The construction of the "home page" is currently underway. We encourage you to start using it and to provide us with your comments and suggestions as we build this system. The address for the home page is: <http://ifsa.tamu.edu/haccpall.html>.

## ◆ Alliance Board of Directors ◆

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