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FSIS AND INTERNATIONAL MEAT AND POULTRY HACCP ALLIANCE SEEK HARMONY IN HACCP TRAINING

COLLEGE STATION, Texas -- Representatives from the International Meat and Poultry HACCP Alliance and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) met on Feb. 27 in Washington, D.C., to determine ways for the Alliance and FSIS to work together more effectively in the areas of HACCP training and information exchange.

According to Dr. H. Russell Cross, executive director of the International Meat and Poultry HACCP Alliance, "The HACCP Alliance provides an excellent mechanism for the industry and FSIS to work together to move from the current system into a HACCP-based system."

During the meeting, participants discussed ways to share training materials, and how to ensure that accredited Alliance training programs use up-to-date HACCP training materials that are consistent with HACCP principles and FSIS regulations. Meeting participants also discussed how industry representatives could participate in FSIS training courses and ways to identify Alliance-accredited HACCP training programs in the USDA/FDA HACCP Training Programs and Resources Database. The USDA/FDA HACCP training database can be accessed through the HACCP Alliance's World Wide Web home page (<http://ifse.tamu.edu/haccpall.html>) or the National Agricultural Library's Food and Nutrition Information Center home page (<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/>).

Alliance representatives previewed materials and videos for one of the FSIS training modules being developed to educate FSIS inspectors on the cultural change aspects of inspection reform. FSIS officials stated that the cultural 'mind-set' change is a very important educational aspect of the training program for both inspectors and industry. FSIS officials said they will share their training materials with the industry because it is important for both the industry and the inspectors to develop a common understanding of HACCP and their different roles and responsibilities.

After viewing some of the training materials, Alliance representatives were very pleased with the efforts of FSIS and appreciated the fact that materials will include the technical aspects as well as information on making the transition smoother for the industry and the inspectors. All participants agreed that it will take time to properly educate the inspectors and the industry on the cultural changes and the technical issues needed to move into the new HACCP system. It was decided at the meeting that FSIS cultural change training modules will be shared with the Alliance as they are being developed. Technical training materials will be shared once the final HACCP rule is published.

Two documents, general HACCP guidebook and a HACCP Hazard Control Guideline, were also discussed and are expected to be available when the final rule is published. Both documents will be released for a comment period before being released in final form. FSIS encouraged the Alliance to provide input on these documents.

Meeting participants also agreed that the Alliance is the best route for information and material exchange between FSIS and industry HACCP course instructors. Communication devices such as the Alliance home page and direct contact with accredited training program coordinators will be used. FSIS officials said they are still trying to determine guidelines on whether FSIS inspectors can attend industry training programs. However, FSIS officials said industry representatives will be included in

FSIS seminars and work unit meeting at the plant and circuit levels.

Overall, the meeting discussions demonstrated the commitment of both the industry and FSIS to food safety. It was obvious that both parties were open and willing to explore opportunities to make the changes as smoothly as possible. "Today's meeting was a major step in bringing the groups together to accomplish a common goal. We are on the right path now, and we just have to keep moving forward together," says Stephen Krut, International Meat and Poultry HACCP Alliance chairman and executive director of the American Association of Meat Processors.