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NAS Issues Final Report on Food Safety Issues

In a final report entitled "Scientific Criteria to Ensure Safe Food", the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) concluded that performance standards are a useful "score card" for measuring process control by food processors and recommended that efforts be made to link such scientific criteria to improvements in public health. The report was commissioned by the U.S. Congress in early 2001, to provide recommendations for the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the Department of Health and Human Service's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on the role and appropriate use of performance standards and other scientific criteria for improving food safety. The report makes several general recommendations, including the development of a comprehensive plan to harmonize disease surveillance and microbial prevalence data and the adoption of science-based strategies in developing food safety criteria. "We are appreciative of all the work and effort that went into this report, and agree with the NAS that development of food safety criteria, including performance standards, must be based on science and linked to public health goals," said Dr. Elsa A. Murano, under secretary for Food Safety. The NAS report outlines various measures for the USDA to undertake, most of which are already being implemented by FSIS including: baseline studies on a variety of pathogens, including *Salmonella* and *E. coli* O157:H7; reevaluation of current *Salmonella* performance standards; expanded testing of *E. coli* O157:H7 to beef trim; research into the ecology of *E. coli* O157:H7; and focused intervention at all stages of production. FSIS is also working to target interventions at appropriate control points to best protect public health and is in the process of developing guidelines for cattle, hog and poultry producers on best management strategies that can be taken on the farm to reduce pathogens in these animals. The report also recommends that Congress grant authorities to regulatory agencies to establish, implement and enforce food safety criteria, including performance standards, but legal analysis of current statutes and regulations conducted by USDA concludes that FSIS does have the legal authority necessary to enforce food safety criteria. The Agency has used the failure to pass microbial standards as indicators of lack of process control in such establishments and withdrawn inspection based on HACCP and other relevant violations. In conjunction with the NAS study, the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF) conducted a study on performance standards in October, 2002, which found that performance standards are valuable tools for verifying process control at slaughter and ground beef establishments, and stated the need for baseline studies and research on intervention strategies from farm to table.

AMSA to Host Reciprocal Meat Conference

The American Meat Science Association will host its 56th Annual Reciprocal Meat Conference June 15-18 at the University of Missouri in Columbia. The conference guarantees to provide valuable information and informative sessions. Dr. Dan Hale of Texas A&M University will chair the event and SMA executive director Dr. Joe Harris served on the planning committee. "This year's RMC will offer a wide variety of topics for participants," says Hale. Besides programs and poster sessions covering meat quality, sensory evaluation, food safety, animal care, muscle profiling, ingredient technology and muscle biology, participants will be treated to a presentation by Dr. Garry McKee, FSIS Administrator and a keynote address by Dr. Rick Rigsby of Texas A&M University. Dr. Rigsby is one of the most dynamic speakers in the United States. He will encourage, inspire and challenge everyone in the audience. There also will be post-conference symposia on pork quality and beef safety. There truly will be something to interest everyone at the 56th Annual Reciprocal Meat Conference. Anyone interested in attending can get more information from the AMSA website (www.meatscience.org), or registration materials may be obtained from the SMA office.

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Researchers Discover *E. coli* Killing Virus

A virus that kills the deadly strain of the food poisoning bacterium *E. coli* has been discovered by a team at Evergreen State College in Washington. Researchers identified the virus, called a bacteriophage, in sheep while trying to infect the animals to test new antibiotics. When the team tested the phage against *E. coli* in the lab, they found it killed 16 out of 18 toxic strains. Meat can be contaminated when the animals are slaughtered, and manure can also be a source of infections. Researchers hope to use the phage, christened CEV1, to wipe out *E. coli* O157:H7 in herds and flocks. In a small trial in sheep, the phage reduced numbers of the toxic bacterium by 99% in just two days, team leader Andrew Brabban told a meeting of the Society for General Microbiology in Edinburgh, Scotland in April. According to Brabban, use of bacteriophages has all sorts of advantages. Phages are far more discriminating than antibiotics, so the natural microbial flora of animals' guts should not be affected. Also, while antibiotics are expensive and must be given to every animal, infecting just one animal with the CEV1 phage is likely to be enough to pass the phage to a whole herd or flock, and the numbers of the phage will rise exponentially as long as there are host bacteria left to infect. The phage seems to persist in animals, suggesting it continues to replicate in a harmless *E. coli* strain after all the O157:H7 bacteria have been destroyed. Finally, while bacteria can develop resistance as they do to antibiotics, the phage can out-evolve them. Brabban thinks that giving the phage to animals is more practical than using it to treat people. For instance, killing *E. coli* O157:H7 causes the release of large quantities of its toxin, which can make a patient's condition worse. Animal treatment would not have to meet the strict safety standards for human therapies, but the team will need to show that the phage will not have an adverse effect on humans if passed to people via food.

USDA Announces New CWD Funding for States

The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced that it is making \$4 million of new funding available to assist state wildlife agencies in addressing chronic wasting disease concerns. "USDA is committed to assisting states, federal agencies and tribes in controlling the growing threat to elk and deer from chronic wasting disease," said Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman. "States and local communities, along with academia and the private sector, are critical partners in this effort." This funding is the latest in a series of steps USDA has taken to assist states in managing their chronic wasting disease concerns. In September 2001, APHIS began a CWD surveillance, depopulation and indemnity program for affected farmed elk populations. In May 2002, the USDA and the Department of the Interior formed a CWD joint working group to ensure a coordinated and cooperative federal approach to assist states with CWD response efforts. Secretary Veneman authorized the transfer of approximately \$15 million in Commodity Credit Corporation funds to implement chronic wasting disease surveillance and indemnity programs in the United States. Most recently, APHIS increased both its surveillance capacity and the number of laboratories certified to test for CWD on an annual basis. APHIS now has a total of 15 contract laboratories on line as part of its National Animal Health Laboratory Network to assist the National Veterinary Services Laboratories in testing for CWD. The funding will be distributed through grants determined by a formula developed in conjunction with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The formula establishes three tiers of states and distributes money according to need. Tier 1 states have known occurrences of CWD in free-ranging cervids as of March 1, Tier 2 states are those states adjacent to Tier 1 states, or states with known CWD occurrences in farmed or captive cervids as of March 1 and all other states are considered Tier 3. To apply for funding, each state must submit management and surveillance plans detailing how the funds will be spent. For more information visit the APHIS Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/cwd/cwd.html.

Welcome, New Member!

SMA is proud to introduce our newest member:

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LAC Consulting Services specializes in the ground beef industry, providing advice and services to help meet every day business goals and overcome the challenges faced by the meat industry. Whether you are a small or large company, starting a new business or expanding a current one, LAC Consulting Services can provide the help you need to manage the challenges and opportunities that come with operating a successful business. Louis A. Ciferri has over 30 years experience in the ground beef industry with a major foodservice and retail supplier and has honed his skills and knowledge. He has experience in fresh patties, IQF patties, MAP, retail chubs, vacuum packaging, equipment design and layouts, project management, new product start-ups, food safety, and HACCP.

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Attend Beyond Basics: HACCP Plan Improvement Workshop for Raw and Cooked Product Operations ,

hosted by SMA, NMA, and the Texas A&M University Department of Animal Science. **May 28-29, 2003**
at the John Koldus Student Services Building, Room 110, at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

**Registration information and course outline are available on the SMA web site
or by contacting the SMA office. Register today!**

Briefly . . .

Packers Can Require COOL Information: Last week the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) released information on country-of-origin labeling (COOL) in response to a complaint filed by R-CALF. The group asked GIPSA to issue a cease-and-desist order to prevent packers from asking producers to provide COOL information and requiring auditing of COOL recordkeeping. "Packers are required to provide information to the retailers regarding Country of Origin and they may be required to maintain records," GIPSA said. "The P&S Act does not prohibit packers from requiring their suppliers to maintain records or from conducting audits of the records that the packer requires." The complete GIPSA response can be accessed at www.usda.gov/gipsa/programspsp/cool.htm.

USDA Increases PHS Officers: Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman recently announced an agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps to significantly expand the number of PHS Commissioned Corps Officers detailed to the Food Safety and Inspection Service. PHS Officers are highly-trained health experts who bring diverse backgrounds and experience to support the FSIS public health mission. Flexible deployment rules allow the officers to assist FSIS staff in instantly responding to emergencies, such as a foodborne illness outbreak and shifting priorities within the agency.

PETA President Concocts Outrageous Will: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) President Ingrid Newkirk has reportedly drawn up a will requesting that, after her death, her flesh be barbecued and her skin be used to make leather products in protest of the inhumane treatment of animals. Newkirk suggested that her feet be removed and made into umbrella stands similar to those made from elephant feet that she had seen as a child, and that her liver be vacuum-packed and sent to France to be used in a campaign to persuade shoppers not to buy foie gras. A PETA spokesman said Newkirk held British and U.S. citizenship, and a copy of her will would be kept in both countries.