

certification of eligibility promulgated at 7 CFR § 1260.530 as published in 51 FR 11557, 11559 (April 4, 1986) are eligible for certification. Those criteria are:

(a) For State organizations or associations:

(1) Total paid membership must be comprised of at least a majority of cattle producers or represent at least a majority of cattle producers in a State or unit.

(2) Membership must represent a substantial number of producers who produce a substantial number of cattle in such State or unit.

(3) There must be a history of stability and permanency.

(4) There must be a primary or overriding purpose of promoting the economic welfare of cattle producers.

(b) For organizations or associations representing importers, the determination by the Secretary as to the eligibility of importer organizations or associations to nominate members to the Board shall be based on applications containing the following information:

(1) The number and type of members represented (i.e., beef or cattle importers, etc.).

(2) Annual import volume in pounds of beef and beef products and/or the number of head of cattle.

(3) The stability and permanency of the importer organization or association.

(4) The number of years in existence.

(5) The names of the countries of origin for cattle, beef, or beef products imported.

All certified organizations and associations, including those which were previously certified in the States or units having vacant positions on the Board, will be notified simultaneously in writing of the beginning and ending dates of the established nomination period and will be provided with required nomination forms and background information sheets.

The names of qualified nominees received by the established due date will be submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture for consideration as appointees to the Board.

The information collection requirements referenced in this notice have been previously approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the provisions of 44 U.S.C., Chapter 35 and have been assigned OMB No. 0581-0093, except Board member nominee information sheets are assigned OMB No. 0505-0001.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 2901 *et seq.*

Dated: March 29, 1996.

Lon Hatamiya,

Administrator.

[FR Doc. 96-8304 Filed 4-3-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-02-P

Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

Forestry Research Advisory Council; Notice of Meeting

According to the Federal Advisory Committee Act of October 6, 1987, (Public Law 92-463, 86 Stat. 770-776) the U.S. Department of Agriculture announces the following meeting:

Name: Forestry Research Advisory Council.

Date: April 29-30, 1996.

Time: 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Place: Governor's House Hotel, 17th Street and Rhode Island Avenue NW., Washington, D.C. 20036

Type of Meeting: Open to the public. Persons may participate in the meeting if time and space permit.

Comments: The public may file written comments before or after the meeting by contacting the person below.

Purpose: The council agenda will include: Results of the 7th American Forest Congress; 1995 Farm Bill Implications; National Science and Technology Council strategy; Government Performance and Results Act; science planning as it relates to forestry and natural resources; review of the Cooperative Forestry Research Program (McIntire-Stennis); and other current research issues. *Contact Person for Agenda and More Information:* Dr. Ralph A. Otto, Natural Resources and Environment, Aerospace Center, Suite 329, Ag Box 2210, Washington, DC 20250-2210; telephone (202) 401-4555.

Dated: March 22, 1996.

B.H. Robinson,

Administrator, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.

[FR Doc. 96-8243 Filed 4-3-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-22-M

Food Safety and Inspection Service

[Docket No. 96-002N]

Notice of Policy Change; Achieving the Zero Tolerance Performance Standard for Beef Carcasses by Knife Trimming and Vacuuming With Hot Water or Steam; Use of Acceptable Carcass Interventions for Reducing Carcass Contamination Without Prior Agency Approval

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is announcing

a change to its trim-only policy for removing fecal, ingesta, and milk contamination from beef carcasses. Currently, all feces, ingesta, and milk must be physically removed from beef carcasses by knife trimming. Under this new policy, FSIS will permit the use of vacuuming beef carcasses with hot water or steam as an alternative to the trim-only policy for removing fecal and ingesta contamination, when such contamination is less than one inch in its greatest dimension.

This notice also lists other carcass decontamination systems that may be used on beef carcasses during the dressing operation. These other interventions may not be used to remove fecal or ingesta contamination. They may be used in conjunction with knife trimming or vacuuming with hot water or steam. They may also be used without prior Agency approval.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. William James, Director, Slaughter Inspection Standards and Procedures Division, Science and Technology, Food Safety and Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250-3700; (202) 720-3219.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Effective prevention and removal of fecal and ingesta contamination are among the most important steps establishments must take to ensure the safety of beef carcasses. Such contamination may harbor *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella*, and other enteric pathogens. Given the association of pathogens with feces and intestinal contents, minimizing the exposure of carcasses to fecal and ingesta contamination and prompt and complete removal of such contamination is critical to food safety.

FSIS has had a long-standing policy prohibiting visible feces or ingesta on inspected and passed beef carcasses. Following the 1993 outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7 food poisoning in the Western United States, FSIS strictly enforced the knife trim-only policy for removing feces and ingesta contamination from beef carcasses.

Prior to the outbreak, warm and ambient temperature washes were sometimes permitted by inspectors to be used to remove small flecks of contaminants. However, inspection personnel did not always determine whether the source of the flecks on beef carcasses was fecal or ingesta contamination or another source, such as rail dust.

After the 1993 outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7, FSIS reiterated that trimming

was to be the only means of removing feces or ingesta contamination from beef carcasses. FSIS reaffirmed the trim policy based on its judgment that trimming was more effective for removing fecal or ingesta contamination than alternative approaches and the Agency's need to directly and aggressively remove any potential source of pathogenic contamination. At the time, there were no scientific data available to the Agency comparing the efficacy of trimming and alternative procedures.

Trimming, if performed properly, is an effective means of physically removing from beef carcasses the visible contamination and any accompanying microbial contamination. A primary advantage of trimming over ambient temperature washing is that it physically removes visibly contaminated tissue (which is more likely to be microbiologically contaminated). Washing may not effectively remove bacteria which are firmly attached. Also, trimming, when properly performed, will have less potential than ambient temperature washing for spreading contamination to other parts of the carcass.

If performed incorrectly, trimming has the potential to cause cross-contamination as the knife moves from areas contaminated with bacteria to newly exposed uncontaminated areas. The effectiveness of trimming depends on the skill of the operator in visually detecting and effectively removing contamination, while avoiding further contamination by handling the carcass during this process.

Since 1993, numerous approaches to removing contamination have been devised and studied to assess their potential as effective alternatives or supplements to carcass trimming to achieve the zero tolerance standard. As a result, a significant amount of new scientific data has become available regarding alternatives to FSIS's trim-only policy for removing fecal and ingesta contamination.

On September 26, 1995, FSIS published a Federal Register notice (60 FR 49553) announcing a public meeting to consider the issue of the most effective means of removing visible fecal or ingesta and associated microbial contamination from beef carcasses. That notice, which indicated that FSIS was considering whether to permit additional methods for achieving the zero tolerance standard, provided an extensive review of the scientific literature on this subject. It also addressed conditions of animals on arrival at slaughter; sources of bacterial contamination during slaughter; the rate

of attachment, growth and multiplication of bacteria on carcasses; and methods to decrease carcass contamination. The notice invited presentation of further technical data and participation in discussions on both technical and policy aspects of the issue. It also presented two series of questions addressing technical matters and policy considerations.

Seventy-two individuals participated in the two-day public meeting. Twelve individuals formally presented data about existing or technologies under development that are proving effective in removing fecal and ingesta and related microbial contamination from beef carcasses. Specific topics discussed included steam and hot water vacuum systems, hot water vacuum data, methods of carcass decontamination, steam pasteurization, comparisons of knife trimming to steam and hot water vacuum treatments, carcass washing versus trimming, antimicrobial treatment conditioning processes, antimicrobial sprays, including acidified sodium chlorite solutions, the efficacy of spray-washing on the removal of bacterial contamination and fecal material, and process intervention for decontamination of beef carcasses using physical and/or antimicrobial treatments. A literature review was also presented. A transcript of the two-day meeting and the papers offered by presenters are available from the FSIS Docket Clerk.¹

While there are a number of promising interventions in various stages of development, the first day's presentations revealed laboratory data supporting the efficacy of using the steam and hot water vacuum technology to remove microorganisms, including pathogens of concern, and a considerable and growing body of data from in-plant trials substantiating the efficacy of this technology.

During the second day of the public meeting, the policy questions in FSIS's meeting notice regarding approval of any alternatives to the existing trim-only requirement were discussed. By the end of the public meeting, a number of participants agreed to the following:

1. In order to meet public health objectives, knife trimming should be combined with other effective technologies, which may include steam or hot water vacuuming, pre- and post-evisceration washes, antimicrobial treatments such as organic acids or trisodium phosphate, and steam pasteurization technology. The

scientific data on decontamination of beef carcasses support a multi faceted approach.

2. Each intervention should be scientifically validated to assure that specific microbiological hazards are effectively controlled.

3. Technologies could and should be combined to meet the needs of individual establishments and processes.

One particular intervention, a vacuum system incorporating hot water and/or steam above 180°F, has been found, by the USDA's Agricultural Research Service, to be effective in removing fecal contamination (less than one inch in its greatest dimension) and associated bacteria, including pathogens, from beef carcasses. Vacuuming with hot water or steam combines physical removal of visible contaminants with microbial inactivation. After the hide is removed, carcass surface areas are treated with hot water or steam and vacuumed. The vacuuming removes contamination and any excess water from the carcass surface. The regulated industry and others have urged FSIS to consider these data and to change its policy accordingly; at the same time, others have urged FSIS to retain the trim-only policy.

During the meeting, the USDA's Agricultural Research Service presented the results of laboratory tests on the effectiveness of a vacuum system which incorporated hot water and steam above 180°F. These tests demonstrated a 3.3 log₁₀ reduction in total bacterial counts on artificially contaminated beef tissues inoculated at a level of 6.4 log₁₀ with bovine feces. When the vacuum was used on beef artificially inoculated at a level of 7.6 log₁₀ with *E. coli* O157:H7, a 5.5 log₁₀ reduction was achieved.

Based upon these results, FSIS approved testing of vacuum systems under commercial conditions in more than 50 plants as a method to remove visible contamination and accompanying microbial contamination. Testing consisted of two phases.

In Phase I, each establishment collected 120 samples over 10 days of production, 60 samples from vacuumed carcasses and 60 samples from knife-trimmed beef carcasses. Establishments were allowed to vacuum half of each day's production for fecal or ingesta contamination that was less than one inch in its greatest dimension. The remaining carcasses were trimmed to remove visible fecal or ingesta contamination. Any fecal or ingesta contamination greater than one inch in its greatest dimension was removed by trimming, no matter which treatment was being applied. This phase provided

¹ The FSIS Docket Clerk is located in Room 4352, South Agriculture Building, 14th & Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250-3700.

a direct comparison of the microbial characteristics of vacuumed and knife trimmed carcasses.

In Phase II, 60 additional samples were collected over 60 days from vacuumed carcasses only. This phase provided data on the ability of each establishment to control the vacuum process over time.

Forty of Phase I and Phase II tests have been completed. Phase I data submitted to the Agency for these 40 tests show the mean of total bacterial levels in the different establishments was 0.69 log colony forming units (CFU)/cm² lower on vacuumed carcasses than knife trimmed carcasses. Phase II results also demonstrated a 0.54 log CFU/cm² lower mean total bacterial level was maintained compared to knife trimmed carcasses.

Thirty two of the establishments completing both phases used hot water vacuuming technology. The mean of total bacterial levels for hot water vacuumed carcasses was lower than trimmed carcasses in both phases. For Phase I, the difference was 0.64 CFU/cm², and for Phase II it was 0.56 CFU/cm². Eight establishments have completed both phases using steam vacuuming technology. The data from these eight establishments show the mean of total bacteria was 0.88 log CFU/cm² lower for vacuumed carcasses for Phase I and 0.43 lower for Phase II.

Phase I tests were conducted in five establishments by researchers from the Department of Animal Sciences, Colorado State University (CSU), Fort Collins, Colorado. In the study, hot water vacuuming of beef carcasses was as effective as knife trimming for removing visible contamination and reducing bacterial populations. The CSU researchers reported reductions of 1.38 and 1.67 log CFU/cm² for mesophilic Aerobic Plate Counts (APC) and 1.62 and 1.67 log CFU/cm² for Total Coliform Counts (TCC) respectively when a 103 cm² area of the carcass was trimmed or vacuumed. (Paper to be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Institute of Food Technologists, New Orleans, LA, June 22–26, 1996.)

In another test conducted by CSU, vacuuming with steam effectively reduced APC and TCC on carcasses with or without visible fecal contamination. When feces were present, the steam vacuuming system was more effective in reducing microbial contamination than knife trimming while both were effective in removing visible contaminants. (Paper to be presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Association of Milk, Food and Environmental Sanitarians, Seattle, WA, June 30–July 3, 1996.)

Based on the data presented and discussion that transpired during the two day public meeting, FSIS has decided to modify its existing policy to permit an alternative method for removal of fecal and ingesta contamination from beef carcasses. When feces or ingesta contamination is less than one inch in its greatest dimension, it may be removed by use of a steam or hot water vacuum as an alternative to knife trimming. Knife trimming is required to remove feces or ingesta contamination one inch or larger. This size limitation and the limitation of the policy change to fecal and ingesta contamination reflects the conditions under which the steam or hot water vacuum technology was tested and found effective. In order to extend the policy to larger areas of contamination or to milk contamination, data would be required demonstrating the effectiveness of the technology for those purposes.

Establishments receiving federal inspection that desire to take advantage of steam or hot water vacuuming for achieving the zero tolerance standard for fecal and ingesta contamination may do so immediately without prior Agency approval, provided that the equipment used as a steam or hot water vacuum system meets the following requirements:

1. The system must provide accurate temperature and vacuum readings. Once the temperature and vacuum parameters are adjusted, before operations start, the system should work properly and steadily without significant reading fluctuations.

2. Water or steam temperatures at the carcass surface must be maintained at a minimum of 180°F. The water or steam temperature recording device should measure the temperature of the water or steam as close as possible to the carcass surface. The system must also have an automatic shut-off system when the temperature of the water or steam falls below 180°F.

3. The vacuum pressure at the carcass surface must be sufficient to remove the steam and water from the vacuum area to prevent dripping.

4. The outer surface of the vacuum head must be subjected continuously to a minimum of 180°F steam or hot water during its use. An alternative would be to sterilize the vacuum head in 180 °F water after each use. Other sterilization procedures may be approved by the inspector-in-charge.

Other Carcass Decontamination Systems

FSIS continues to permit the use of other carcass decontamination systems

(antimicrobial treatments) in the slaughter of beef carcasses during the dressing operation. This supports a multifaceted approach to reduce microbial contamination. The interventions listed below may be used by establishments without prior Agency approval. These interventions, which may not be used to remove visible fecal or ingesta contamination, may be used in conjunction with knife trimming or vacuuming with hot water or steam. Fecal and ingesta contamination will be removed prior to the use of the other interventions at appropriate stages of the slaughter process. These include:

1. A pre-evisceration system which consists of a water rinse, followed by a rinse with a solution of food grade organic acid(s). The first rinse is applied as a low pressure water rinse to remove incidental foreign material such as hair, dirt, and rail dust and accompanying bacteria before they dry and become firmly attached to carcass tissues. The second rinse of an aqueous solution of organic acid(s) is applied as a mist or small droplets to all exposed carcass surfaces to reduce the microbial population and retard microbial growth. Food grade organic acids, such as acetic, lactic, and citric acids, which are considered by FDA to be multiple purpose "generally recognized as safe" (GRAS) food substances or direct food substances affirmed as GRAS, may be used. FSIS approved automated two cabinet (carcass wash cabinet and acid sanitizing cabinet) systems are available and may be used to apply acids to beef carcasses.

2. Organic acid treatment. As stated above, food grade FDA GRAS organic acids, such as acetic, lactic, and citric acid, may be used in an aqueous solution of 1.5–2.5 percent acid applied to skinned carcasses as a mist, fog, or small droplet rinse. Acid treatments may be used as a decontamination intervention during dressing of beef carcasses at any point where beef carcasses are allowed to be rinsed with water. FSIS approved automated acid sanitizing cabinets or hand operated equipment may be used to apply acids to beef carcasses.

3. Chlorinated water. Chlorinated water containing 20 to 50 ppm chlorine may be used as an antimicrobial intervention during dressing of beef carcasses at any point where beef carcasses are rinsed with water. Chlorine sources generally recognized as safe for this purpose include: chlorine gas; sodium, potassium, or calcium hypochlorite; chlorine dioxide; or electrolytically generated hypochlorous acid.

4. Trisodium phosphate (TSP). TSP applied to beef carcasses by spraying with a solution of water and food grade TSP containing 8 to 12 percent TSP and maintained at a temperature of 90 °F to 110 °F. The treatment can be applied for no more than 30 seconds. TSP may be used as an antimicrobial intervention during dressing of beef carcasses at any point where beef carcasses are rinsed with water. FSIS approved automated cabinets for the application of TSP are commercially available. The current approved cabinet

recirculates the TSP solution. TSP may also be applied by hand operated equipment.

5. Hot water or steam. Water or steam applied to the surface of the carcass at a temperature greater than 165 °F (≥ 74 °C) and applied for more than 10 seconds has been demonstrated to be an effective antimicrobial intervention. This includes the Cargill/Frigoscandia Steam Pasteurization Process applied to beef. The equipment must meet the requirements in 9 CFR 308.5 and the method of application may not interfere with inspection or create a sanitation problem due to mist, fog, or condensation. Hot water or steam may be used as an intervention during dressing of beef carcasses at any point where beef carcasses are currently allowed to be rinsed with water. FSIS approved automated or hand held equipment may be used.

6. Air or steam. Air or steam may be used to remove incidental foreign material such as hair, dirt, and rail dust, from carcasses. The air or steam containing the contaminants must be confined so that it is captured by a water curtain or exhaust system. The equipment must meet the requirements in 9 CFR 308.5 and the method of application may not interfere with inspection or create a sanitation problem due to mist, fog, or condensation.

Areas of carcasses with fecal or ingesta contamination, open abscesses, septic bruises, parasites or parasitic lesions, or lactating udders will not be treated until those conditions have been removed.

FSIS encourages the introduction of new technologies which demonstrably enhance food safety. FSIS believes that the data on the steam vacuum technology supports its use. Technologies which enhance food safety should be scientifically validated to assure that specific microbiological hazards are effectively controlled. FSIS will continue to encourage companies to prevent contamination, rather than relying on after-the-fact efforts to correct problems. Establishments must direct their energies at preventing such contamination.

Done at Washington, DC, on: March 27, 1996.

Michael R. Taylor,

Acting Under Secretary for Food Safety.

[FR Doc. 96-7938 Filed 4-3-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-DM-P

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Bedrock Creek Supplemental Watershed Protection Project; Clearwater and Nez Perce Counties, Idaho

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Agriculture.

ACTION: Notice of finding of no significant impact.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Joyce Swartzendruber, Acting State Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Room 124, 3244 Elder Street, Boise, Idaho 83705, telephone (208) 378-5700.

NOTICE: Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969; the Council on Environmental Quality Guidelines (40 CFR Part 1500); and the Natural Resources Conservation Service Guidelines (7 CFR Part 650); the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, gives notice that an environmental impact statement is not being prepared for the Bedrock Creek Supplemental Watershed Protection Project, Clearwater and Nez Perce Counties, Idaho.

The Plan/Environmental Assessment of this federally assisted action indicates that the project will not cause significant local, regional, or national impacts on the environment. As a result of these findings, Joyce Swartzendruber, Acting State Conservationist, has determined that the preparation and review of an environmental impact statement was not needed for this project.

The Bedrock Creek Supplemental Watershed Protection Project consists of a system of land treatment measures designed to project the resource base, reduce off-site sediment, and improve the quality of waters entering the Clearwater River. Planned treatment practices include channel vegetation, proper grazing use, heavy use area protection, livestock exclusion, filter strips, stockwater developments, water and sediment control basins, fish stream improvements, fencing, and grade stabilization structures.

The Notice of Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been forwarded to the Environmental Protection Agency. The basic data development during the plan/environmental assessment are on file and may be reviewed by contacting Ms. Joyce Swartzendruber. The FONSI has been sent to various Federal, State, and local agencies, and interested parties. A limited number of copies of the FONSI are available to fill single copy requests at the address stated on the previous page.

No administrative action on the proposal will be initiated until 30 days after the date of this publication in the Federal Register.

Dated: March 25, 1996.

Joyce Swartzendruber,

Acting State Conservationist.

[FR Doc. 96-8264 Filed 4-3-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-16-M

COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

Agenda and Notice of Public Meeting of the Connecticut Advisory Committee

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to the provisions of the rules and regulations of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, that a meeting of the Connecticut Advisory to the Commission will convene at 1:00 p.m. and adjourn at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 23, 1996, at the Hartford City Hall, Function Room, 550 Main Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06103. The purpose of the meeting is to plan activities.

Persons desiring additional information, or planning a presentation to the Committee, should contact Committee Chairperson Dr. Ivor J. Echols, 203-688-2009, or Ki-Taek Chun, Director of the Eastern Regional Office, 202-376-7533 (TDD 202-376-8116). Hearing-impaired persons who will attend the meeting and require the services of a sign language interpreter should contact the Regional Office at least five (5) working days before the scheduled date of the meeting.

The meeting will be conducted pursuant to the provisions of the rules and regulations of the Commission.

Dated at Washington, DC, March 27, 1996.
Carol-Lee Hurley

Chief, Regional Programs Coordination Unit

[FR Doc. 96-8206 Filed 4-3-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6335-01-P

Agenda and Notice of Public Meeting of the West Virginia Advisory Committee

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to the provisions of the rules and regulations of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, that a meeting of the West Virginia Advisory to the Commission will convene at 11:00 a.m. and adjourn at 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 29, 1996, at the Martinsburg Berkely County Library, Martinsburg Room, 101 W. King Street, Martinsburg, West Virginia 25401. The purpose of the meeting is to plan activity and exchange information collected by the subcommittee on the Committee's project on Migrant Farmworkers in the Eastern Panhandle. The Committee anticipates inviting