

The Meat and Poultry Inspection Division

The 2001 fiscal year has brought significant and lasting changes in the Meat and Poultry Inspection Division. The year signaled a fundamental change in its approach to food safety and a shift to a science-based inspection system based on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) concept.

HACCP eliminates a "command and control" approach to regulated establishments based on detailed regulatory provisions and focuses on comprehensive evaluation of the whole food processing system in order to determine potential hazards and preventive measures. The new inspection system is based on science, the practical application of new technologies and extensive knowledge of food micro-biology, risk assessment and elements of epidemiology, rather than based on rigid regulatory requirements. The new system allows regulated establishments to use new production methods, apply modern processing technologies and offers much more flexibility in their approach to food safety. The fundamental changes in re-orienting the regulatory inspection program toward a flexible, science-based inspection system, has been a major undertaking in FY 2001.

During Fiscal Year 2001, the Division provided continuous slaughter inspections and daily meat and poultry processing inspection at 26 commercial establishments. Daily plant inspections utilized the Performance-Based Inspection System (PBIS). The computer-driven system is a sophisticated inspection tool based on public health risk assessment principles. The system eliminates the inspector's subjectivity and allows for the most efficient utilization of our manpower. PBIS provides three important functions for inspectors: risk management, automated support systems and scheduling of inspector's tasks. The computer software program is also an excellent tool in early detection of any detrimental trends before they become potential health protection problems. In the past fiscal year, the inspectors and veterinarians of this division examined

almost 10,000 animals before slaughter (antemortem) and inspected them afterward (postmortem). All animals offered for slaughter received an abbreviated veterinary clinical examination — both in motion and at rest — immediately prior to slaughter. Postmortem inspections included routine incisions, palpations and observations of the animal carcasses, their lymphatic system and detailed inspection of internal organs such as the liver, kidneys, lungs, heart, spleen and all intestines. Animals that showed clinical signs or lesions on postmortem inspections were retained for detailed veterinary inspection and final disposition. One-hundred thirty-three carcasses and a total of 47,839 pounds of parts were condemned at postmortem inspection. The condemned carcasses represent 1.36 percent of all inspected animals.

Besides examining animals and carcasses, Division inspectors and veterinarians verified that each carcass was properly dressed, and all procedures were conducted in a sanitary manner. Particular attention was paid to the humane approach to slaughter operations.

The implementation of the HACCP concept necessitated the beginning of sampling and testing of raw meat products for the presence of *Salmonella*. The sampling and testing by a government laboratory are required to verify the plant's performance in pathogen reduction and serves as a preventive tool in assuring food safety. In FY 2001, Division staff collected about 350 samples for the presence of *Salmonella*. All were negative.