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FALL 2006

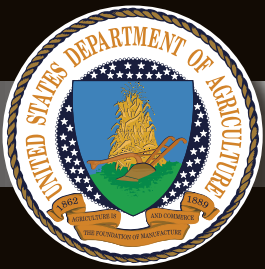
# FoodSafe™

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food Safety and Inspection Service

The FSIS Magazine



*A Century of Service  
A Future of Promise  
A Legacy of Public Health*



## A Message from the Secretary



America offers the most abundant and affordable food supply in the world. More importantly, we have the safest food supply in the world and USDA takes very seriously our responsibilities related to food safety. On June 28, the U.S. Department of Agriculture celebrated 100 years of food safety under the Federal Meat Inspection Act, which was signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt on June 30, 1906.

Over the course of the last decade, we have seen in product testing a significant reduction in the prevalence of disease-causing bacteria such as *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Listeria monocytogenes*, two particularly harmful pathogens. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention verifies the importance of this by showing significant declines of up to 40 percent in human illnesses caused by these and other pathogens when comparing 2005 rates with 1998 rates. I know that FSIS is firmly committed to even more reductions in the prevalence of pathogens on meat and poultry products as well as to realizing greater reductions in human cases of foodborne illness.

The men and women of the Food Safety and Inspection Service serve as the first line of defense when it comes to preserving the safety of the food supply. But there are many challenges that we still face and that lie ahead of us. The threat of a terrorist attack on the nation's food supply and the potential threat of highly pathogenic avian influenza are just two examples.

How do we continue to successfully deal with these and other challenges that lie ahead?

It takes a workforce of dedicated public servants who are committed to protecting public health through food safety and food

defense. I am proud to say that we already have that workforce in place thanks to the conscientious professionals at USDA. It takes a firm commitment to develop and then implement policies and regulations based on the latest science and to most effectively use our resources and authorities to further improve our food protection systems. And finally, it requires a cooperative approach from all those who have a vested interest in the food supply. And, since we are all dependent upon food, this means every single American can play his or her part. From farm to fork, we all play a role in keeping our food safe.

Farmers and ranchers must be committed to raising only the very best — and safest — food products. Food companies and food processors must continue to be vigilant about ensuring that food is processed in accordance with the federal standards that are in place to ensure safety. Consumers can learn about USDA's key food safety recommendations, which will help them to further reduce the threat of foodborne illness at home. The USDA and other government agencies will continue to make regulatory decisions based on sound science and excel in our role as the first line of defense for food safety and food security.

As we begin the next 100 years under the Federal Meat Inspection Act, as well as the other food safety statutes that USDA is entrusted with implementing, we can look back at our history and be proud of the advances we have made. I am proud of the men and women of USDA who contribute to the safest, most secure food supply the world has ever seen.

  
MIKE JOHANNS  
Secretary of Agriculture

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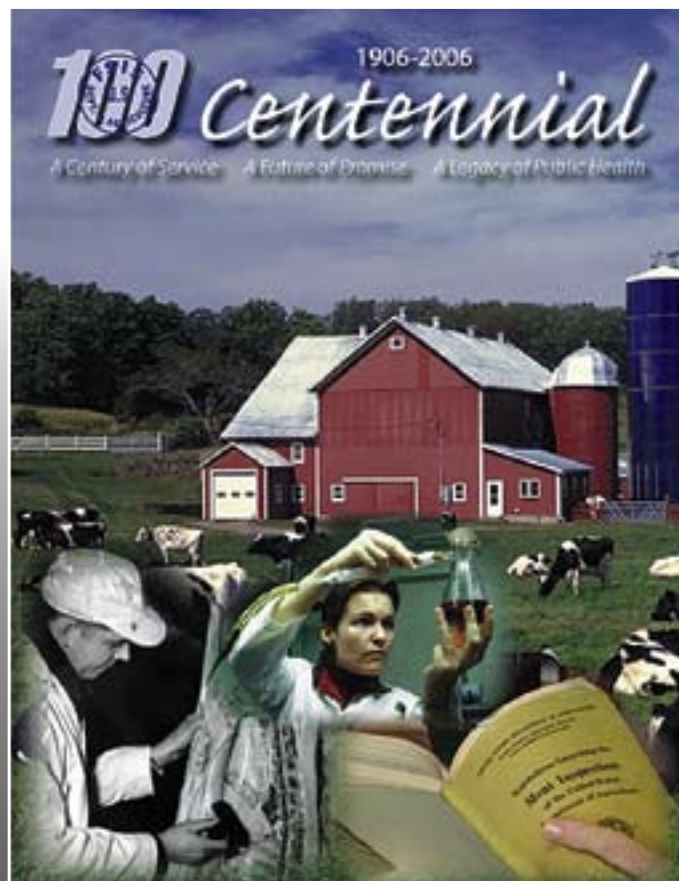
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*The hand stamp marking the end of each article was displayed at the 100 years celebration from the collection of Dr. Robert Ragland.*



## A CENTURY OF PROGRESS IN FOOD SAFETY

In 1906, Congress passed the Federal Meat Inspection Act, laying the foundation for the food safety system that led to the creation of the Food Safety and Inspection Service and to Americans having the safest food supply in the world.

Over these 100 years, FSIS has implemented and improved inspection systems, workforce training and consumer education with the latest science and research to ensure the safety and wholesomeness of meat, poultry and egg products.

*Story begins on page 12.*

# under secretary USDA



## Commitment and Dedication to Public Health

**A**s USDA's Under Secretary for Food Safety, I'm certainly glad to see this first issue of *be FoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine*. I hope you'll find this quarterly publication by the Food Safety and Inspection Service to be a valuable public health tool.

USDA Secretary Mike Johanns and I share a passion for public health. I accepted this position last year in large part because I knew of the Secretary's commitment to public health from my experience of working with him in Nebraska for six years. The long history this agency has of protecting public health was another aspect that drew me to this opportunity.

In fact, this year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906, which ushered in a new era of food safety. Even prior to the passage of the Act, FSIS' predecessor agency, the Bureau of Animal Industry, carried out many important responsibilities to protect public health here and abroad. With an appropriation of \$150,000 in 1884, its first year, the BAI focused on preventing diseased animals from being used as food. Then, in 1891, the initial Meat Inspection Act of 1890 was amended to cover inspection and certification of all exported live cattle and beef.

Our inspection goals are now driven by our public health goals, and we have come along way in protecting public health.

One hundred years ago in the United States, the life expectancy was 45 years. Now, it is approximately 75 years. Life expectancy was so short then because young children died in high numbers from infectious diseases — enteritis, dysentery, small pox, diphtheria, and typhus, to name a few. Of all deaths, 20 percent were children less than five years of age — now, it's less than 1 percent. Clean water, proper sewage treatment, vaccines and antibiotics have all played important roles, but a safer food supply has also played a vital role in this amazing improvement.

As just one example, the number of persons diagnosed with *E. coli* O157:H7 dropped by 29 percent in the last seven years. This is truly a good story, but our journey is far from over. There is much more we need to do. The Secretary and I want to push the envelope to improve food safety and public health. We all must strive to do better because of constantly evolving threats and challenges to food safety and our public health system.

Having spent my entire adult life in the health profession, I know that the public health environment constantly evolves and it is not a nine-to-five job. Product recalls during off hours and the agency's response in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina are just a couple of examples of the many instances when FSIS personnel worked many hours beyond their regular tours of duty.

That's why I'm truly proud of and impressed by the dedicated professionals who work for FSIS and for our many food safety partnering organizations. They often put in long hours to ensure that this nation's meat, poultry and egg products supply is the safest in the world. With everyone's collaboration, improving public health becomes a much easier and enjoyable task.

I hope you find *be FoodSafe* a valuable tool. I do believe you'll find new and interesting pieces of information to share with your colleagues, friends and family. Better yet, I invite you to contribute ideas and information to the magazine. We all hope *be FoodSafe* will contribute to improving public health for all Americans.

RICHARD A. RAYMOND, M.D.  
Under Secretary  
Office of Food Safety

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# administrator FSIS

## Meeting Today's Challenges

**W**elcome to our inaugural issue of *be FoodSafe: The FSIS Magazine*. We are proud to offer you this exciting new publication as the Food Safety and Inspection Service celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906. This issue has a special emphasis on the agency's achievements over the past 100 years, which I hope you will enjoy.

Although FSIS was established under its current name by the Secretary of Agriculture on June 17, 1981, our history dates back prior to 1906. Our mission is to ensure that meat, poultry and processed egg products distributed in commerce for human food are safe, secure, wholesome and accurately labeled. FSIS is charged with administering and enforcing not only the FMIA, but also the Poultry Products Inspection Act, the Egg Products Inspection Act, portions of the Agricultural Marketing Act and the regulations that implement these laws.

Guided by these statutes, we've adapted our programs and activities to meet today's responsibilities. Our challenge is to anticipate and quickly respond to food safety and food defense challenges before they affect public health.

To meet these challenges, we believe an effective food safety and food defense system must be rooted in science. To achieve our public health goal, we'll continue to review policies and regulations in light of what the science demands. We'll proactively make improvements based on available data. We'll also work with all interested parties to modernize and enhance our inspection and food safety and food defense verification efforts in the interest of inclusion and transparency.

Protecting the safety of our meat, poultry and egg products supply is no small task. Approximately 7,600 full-time personnel cover nearly 6,000 slaughter and processing plants. We conduct antemortem and postmortem inspection procedures at 1,700 slaughter establishments to ensure public health requirements are met in processing 140 million head of livestock, 9.4 billion poultry carcasses and about 4.3 billion pounds of liquid egg products on an annual basis. Billions of pounds of meat, poultry and egg products are also presented each year for FSIS import inspection.

Approximately 200 microbiologists, chemists and veterinary pathologists staff three laboratories and maintain the highest international standards of excellence. They are equipped to conduct continuous regulatory testing on meat, poultry and egg products. One is even equipped to conduct analyses on potential terrorism agents.

With our size and with employees and partners all around the country, it quickly became apparent to me that effective communication is central to our mission. I believe *be FoodSafe* will be another effective communication vehicle between FSIS and its many partners. We hope you'll find this quarterly informative and helpful.

In this issue, we provide a broad picture of FSIS and its employees. However, this is *your* magazine, and in order to serve you best, we want to hear your input, ideas and suggestions on how to make it work best for you. Thank you for your support.

*Barbara J. Masters*  
BARBARA J. MASTERS, D.V.M.  
FSIS Administrator

# around the Agency

By Matthew D. Baun

## Seniority Rules!

**S**omewhere in Minneapolis, there sits an office building with a room and a file cabinet. In that cabinet, there are file folders that contain the names of all Food Safety and Inspection Service employees who are assigned to a field office. One of these files belongs to **Dr. Paul A. Allen**, a federal veterinarian based in San Antonio, Texas.

At first glance, you see that Allen retired from FSIS in 1988, 30 years after he first began as a veterinary meat inspector for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Then you notice that Allen is still employed with FSIS.

But this is no typo. The fact is, Allen went back to work only a few months after retiring. He is currently the longest tenured employee in FSIS, and in August 2006, Allen began his 49<sup>th</sup> year as a federal veterinarian at USDA.

Considering the length of his career alone, Allen stands where few others have. That Allen is African-American and first came to USDA in the pre-civil rights era makes his story all the more remarkable.

As an undergrad at Dillard University in New Orleans, he developed an interest in the sciences — psychology, to be exact. Allen then went on to Tuskegee University and made his way to the veterinary school. He applied to the civil service in January 1958 and that August, Allen began work as a USDA veterinarian in a Delaware poultry plant. Before ultimately settling in Texas, Allen was

stationed in towns in Pennsylvania, Maine and Massachusetts.

When he first came to USDA in 1958, meat inspection and poultry inspection were under two separate divisions. The Poultry Products Inspection Act had been recently passed and USDA was responsible for its enforcement.

“Because it was a new act, some of the poultry plants figured they could protest the Act by not adhering to its requirements. We had to send a message of how serious we were. We shut down some of these plants for a brief period,” Allen said.

As a processing inspector in the early 1980s, **Al Almanza**, now an FSIS district manager in Dallas, worked with Allen. “He is one of the finest, most dedicated veterinarians I have worked for and with during my career,” Almanza said. “He has always taken his job with FSIS very seriously and has led by example throughout his career.”

So what piece of advice does this 49-year FSIS veteran offer to new veterinary graduates who may be looking to enter the FSIS workforce?

“Vet schools don’t teach what it is like to work at FSIS,” Allen states in a matter-of-fact voice. “A big part of the job is about public relations. You will be challenged by plant officials and, at times, they can be aggressive and overbearing in their points of view. You have to learn to deal with that.” After almost half a century, Allen can deal with it better than anyone else.

Allen has dealt with other challenges as well. In addition to coming from a poor family with little in the way of formal education, he battled an



**Dr. Paul Allen sits in his office, proudly displaying a wall of recognitions from his career. He is currently the longest tenured FSIS employee, having started with the agency in 1958.** (Photo courtesy of Dr. Allen)

anxiety disorder and a speech impediment. Yet these obstacles did not stand in his way — nor did the more ominous threats of workplace intolerance and racism that he encountered far too frequently in those early years of federal service.

Ask Allen what his greatest achievement is, he immediately points to his humble beginnings and how he was able to turn the cards in order to “rise to the level of performance that I was able to achieve” at USDA.

# More CSIs than CBS?

## CSI: Anchorage

It may not be the hit CBS television show, but ask **John Goulet** what it is like to be a consumer safety inspector (CSI) in Anchorage and he will be the first to say that Anchorage is not as remote as people like to think, noting that there are more than 250,000 people living in that city alone. But Goulet does seem to get around.

"I average 100 miles a day right now. One establishment is 140 miles away," he said. But Goulet has also experienced the great Alaskan expanse. One time, he served a 14-week detail at a reindeer slaughter plant on Nunivak Island in the Bering Sea.

## CSI: Hawaii

Speaking of islands, **Frederick Marvin** is a consumer safety inspector in the town of Kalihi on the island of Oahu. So just what exactly is the best thing about working in Hawaii?

"Almost everything — it is Hawaii. Even here in paradise, we are doing our part to help protect public health," Marvin said. Okay, then, what are your least favorite aspects? "The median price of a home is \$640,000 — absolutely ridiculous. Plus, there is a limitation on how far you can drive," Marvin says. "I can't take a cross-country drive ... or even drive around the entire state."

## CSI: Saipan

Yet another islander story. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is a chain of 14 tropical islands in the Western Pacific. **Frank S. Tenorio** is an animal health officer with the commonwealth and is cross-licensed as an FSIS consumer safety inspector for the Northern

Marianas. Tenorio is assigned to four import plants, three processing and one slaughter plant on the island of Saipan, the capital that has a population of approximately 70,000. Among the attractions are white sandy beaches, lots of golf courses and, says Tenorio, "if you live on the mountain you get to see the sun rise and set from one location." Most rewarding for Tenorio is the opportunity to "protect consumers out here in a remote place. I am very lucky and proud about this program and the fine folks in the Denver District Office and Hawaii circuit. They really help me a lot."

# Inspecting the Big Apple

What takes up 17 city blocks and is home to art galleries, \$435-per-night hotel rooms and about 19 USDA-inspected establishments? Why, it is none other than the swanky Meat Packing District of New York City, perhaps better known at the Gansevoort Market or the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Market.

A one-time home to approximately 200 plants, the market district has transformed itself into one of the city's trendiest neighborhoods after a real estate boom that led meat companies to sell their spaces for millions of dollars.

"A great many of the plants moved to different locations like Hunts Point Market in the Bronx and Brooklyn Market in Brooklyn," notes **Michael Washington**, an FSIS deputy district manager in New York City. "There are now upscale boutiques, restaurants, a hotel and bars."

Some neighborhood groups have vowed to preserve the old-time charm of the district's commercial architecture. Think warehouses, metal awnings, cobblestoned streets and a railroad track above the market

place, which was once used to bring in live animals that were slaughtered in the market.

Currently, there are no slaughter operations in the market district.

This is probably a good thing for tourists and patrons of the Hotel Gansevoort, who may not care for such sights and sounds from the hotel's rooftop pool and gardens. To its credit, the 187-room, 14-floor luxury hotel, which opened in 2004, has attempted to retain some of the charm and character of the district's earlier history.

Over the summer, you could book a weekend getaway — The Meat Packing Package — on the hotel's Web site. The perks are late check out, access to the pool, with the "first poolside beverage on the house."

So what happens when butchers run into fashion designers on the sidewalk? Washington explains that the market starts at 4 a.m. and usually ceases to be active by 11 a.m. — just past the time when most of the boutiques in the neighborhood open.

What is life like on the ground today in the market district for an FSIS inspector?

**Amina Beg**, a five-year veteran of FSIS, is an inspector-in-charge at nine different establishments in the market district where the plants produce primal and subprimal cuts of pork, veal, beef, lamb and poultry products. Though there are no retail counters in the market, these companies do supply products to area restaurants as well as others outside the New York Metro area.

What is the least desirable thing about working in Manhattan? "The traffic and parking in the city are challenging every day," said Beg, "sometimes to the point of frustration."

What is the best thing? "The excitement of working in one of the biggest cities in the world ... I am exposed to many different types of cultures," she said. 🍷