



The Food Safety Staff

Established November 2004

FY2009 Annual Report

VISION:

To eliminate all food safety hazards in foods provided through the USDA nutrition assistance programs.

MISSION:

To increase awareness, visibility, and impact of food safety on USDA nutrition assistance programs and represent FNS programs in the wider Federal and State food safety community.

Summary of FY2009

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Introduction

In FY 2009, the Food Safety Staff (FSS) of the Office of Emergency Management and Food Safety (OEMFS) received \$2.51M in funding from Congress that allowed the initiation of new projects in addition to the continuation of existing projects. FSS made significant progress on projects related to food allergies in schools, norovirus control, and the cooling dynamics of foods. Norovirus and improper cooling are the two leading causes of foodborne illness outbreaks in schools according to CDC data. FSS staff responded to FNS program operators and other agency partners on topics such as bisphenol-A, food allergies, safety of fresh produce, and food defense. Lessons learned from the Hallmark/Westland beef recall of 2008 will be incorporated into a revision of the 2001 Hold and Recall Procedures that will be completed in calendar year 2010.

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New Initiatives

Food Allergies and Anaphylaxis

The FSS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division of Adolescent and School Health, the FNS Child Nutrition Division, and the School Nutrition Association collaborated on a work group meeting to address food allergies in schools entitled “CDC Expert Panel and USDA Work Group on Managing Food Allergies in Schools,” which was held in February 2009. Nationally recognized professionals from the National School Boards Association, the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network, and others came together to review food allergy guidance for schools, which was under development by CDC and its partners, and identify best practices and educational gaps for schools and school foodservice operators. FSS ultimately will create an appendix on the subject for inclusion in USDA’s *Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in School Programs: Guidance for School Food Service Staff* and develop educational materials based on this workshop in collaboration with the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI).

FSS hosted a webinar series and preconference session in conjunction with the School Nutrition Association at their Annual National Conference June 28, 2009.. The webinar series, entitled *Managing Food Allergies in Schools*, consisted of three 60-minute webinars that addressed different aspects of managing food allergies in schools: understanding the fundamentals, developing policy, and implementing policy. A total of 2,177 participated in the webinars or viewed the archives as of December 15, 2009, and approximately 30 attended the 8-hour preconference session entitled, “Solving the Food Allergy Problem.” Four 15-minute podcasts will be produced in 2010.

Norovirus Control and Prevention

Both FSS and CDC analysis of CDC data show that norovirus is the primary cause of foodborne illness in schools. Norovirus spreads extremely rapidly and the use of proper cleaning techniques that destroy the virus is a critical intervention strategy. FSS provided scientific content and funding for an educational project with the National Education Association Health Information Network (NEA HIN) to develop and distribute *The Stomach Bug Book*, an easy-to-read, illustrated educational tool that addresses appropriate sanitation methods to prevent or limit an outbreak. FSS will distribute 50,000 copies to State Agencies in 2010. The booklet also will be distributed to foodservice personnel, custodians, nurses, and other support staff through NEA HIN. *The Stomach Bug Book* is available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/safety/stomach_bug_book.pdf.

Produce Safety

Increased funding for fresh produce in schools raises the potential for an increase in foodborne illness. To help mitigate these risks and alleviate the concerns of school foodservice operators, FSS partnered with the Agricultural Marketing Service Fresh Produce Branch to create “Produce Safety University” (PSU). PSU will be a week long, hands-on training in all principles of produce: how it is grown, harvested, processed, packaged and shipped before reaching school foodservice where it is prepared and served, sometimes using novel delivery systems outside of the school cafeteria to children. Special emphasis will be placed on farm-to-school and school

garden programs. Three sessions will be offered beginning in late summer of 2010. FSS partnered with the University of Maryland's Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition to host a one-day workshop in October 2009 to address the food safety implications associated with fresh produce in schools and identify current gaps and determine appropriate research and educational projects needed to address them.

Cooling Practices in Schools

FNS is collaborating with the FDA's National Center for Food Safety and Technology, the Moffett Center at Illinois Institute of Technology, and the Agricultural Research Service on a research project designed to evaluate cooling methods used in school foodservice and their efficacy and develop recommendations for best practices. The first year of this two-year project was completed in fiscal year 2009 and included site visits to schools, laboratory studies for two food items using three cooling methods, and computer cooling simulations. Based on the findings of this study, the National Food Service Management Institute will develop a series of fact sheets and other educational resources for school foodservice staff.

Food Defense Tabletop Exercises

FSS is developing a do-it-yourself Tabletop Exercise (TTX) to assist school districts in testing their response to an intentional food contamination event. Participants learn to work with appropriate community entities such as emergency services, local and state health departments, local medical facilities, and law enforcement agencies. The first pilot test of the scenario was conducted in October 2009 in a large school district. Two additional pilot tests will be conducted in small and medium-sized school districts in 2010. The pilot tests will be converted into a multimedia tool kit that will be completed in late 2010 and subsequently field tested. The final package will qualify for Department of Homeland Security grants and can be used by school districts to augment their emergency management plans.

Commodity Food Safety

Hold and Recall Events

Spaghetti Sauce: 3,752 cases of spaghetti sauce (A243) from three states were put on hold by AMS and FDA after one warehouse reported that a few cans were bulging and exploding. FDA laboratory analysis revealed isolated closure problems in affected cans. The products were replaced.

Peanut Butter: 212,004 lbs of peanuts and peanut butter (B473, B474, B480, B498, B501) from 16 States, 9 Indian Tribal Organizations, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico were destroyed as part of the Peanut Corporation of America recall announced by FDA and the Texas Department of State Health Services of peanut products potentially contaminated with *Salmonella*.

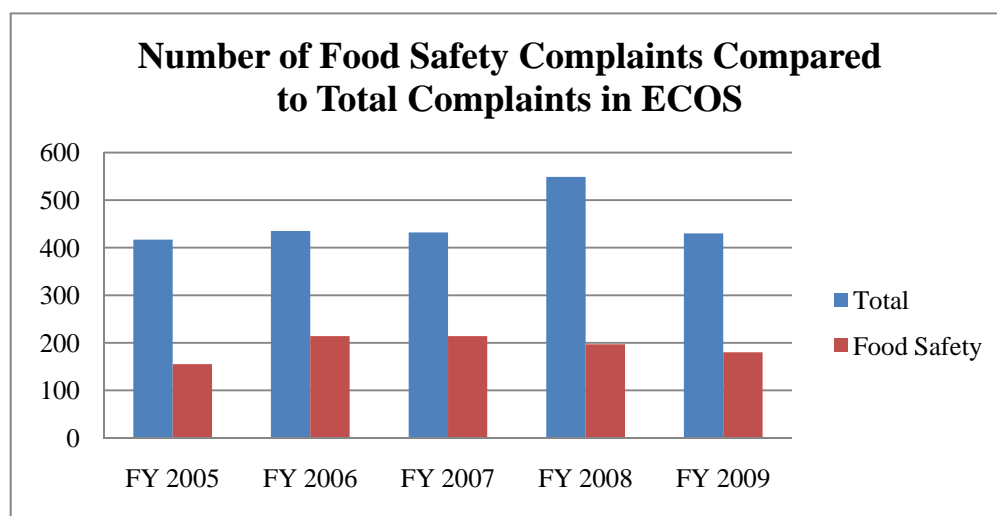
Frozen Blueberries: 7200 cases of frozen blueberries (A387) from five states were held following one complaint of foreign material. An investigation by FDA and the USDA Office of the Inspector General revealed no potential health threat due to the blueberries, which were released.

Non-Commodity Recall Bulletins Posted to the Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS)

Recalls of public health significance that do not affect foods purchased by USDA for its nutrition assistance programs, but which may have been procured by states or schools from commercial sources are posted to the ECOS home page in summary form with links to further information posted by FDA or FSIS. In FY 2009, recall information for ground beef, peanut products, and hot dogs was posted to ECOS.

Commodity Food Safety Complaints

The FSS monitors and analyzes complaints about USDA-purchased commodities for potential food safety concerns. State Agencies enter complaints into ECOS, which automatically flags an item for a food safety review based on the problem description. The FSS determines whether it is an isolated incident or part of a larger trend. If necessary, the FSS contacts the appropriate procurement or regulatory agencies, follows up with the complainant for additional information, and works closely with the FNS Food Distribution Division's Complaint Team to ensure resolution.



Participation in GAO Investigations

In 2009, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report addressing food recalls in school meals programs. FSS and other federal partners, AMS and FSIS, participated in meetings and conference calls with GAO to answer questions about recent school food recalls and how the recall process unfolds for USDA-purchased and commercially purchased foods. FSS also provided extensive comments on the GAO draft report. The final report was issued in August and is available at:

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09649.pdf>.

Technical Assistance for FNS Programs

Assistance Provided to Special Nutrition Programs:

Food Distribution Division

- Clarified information for a GAO review of domestic and international food irradiation uses and practices, including irradiated beef products offered in 2004-2005 in the National School Lunch Program.

- Contacted FSIS about a question on the use of antibiotics in poultry feed.
- Responded to a Freedom of Information Act request on a commercial beef recall.

Child Nutrition Division

- Reviewed farm-to-school guidance materials under development by the Child Nutrition Division and provided two appendices that address food safety.

The Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

- Provided technical assistance for responses to perchlorate and bisphenol-A questions. These two chemical contaminants are of interest and concern to FNS program participants, especially pregnant women, infants, and children.

Assistance Provided to the Office of Program Service and Support, including Regional Offices:

- Led monthly conference calls with FNS Regional Office (RO) representatives to discuss current and upcoming food safety information, resources, and projects.
- Sent food safety information bulletins and notifications of commodity and non-commodity recalls to RO representatives when needed.
- Assisted FNS RO staff with a question from a State Agency about the labeling of bread.
- Answered questions about the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) for RO staff members.

Assistance Provided to FNS Office of Research and Analysis:

- Submitted questions on traceability of inventory and food safety criteria for procurement in the upcoming School Food Purchase Study III.

Collaboration with Federal Partners:

- Participated in creating the Food Safety objectives for Healthy People 2020 along with staff from FDA, FSIS, and CDC.
- Participated with FSIS and AMS in reviewing and updating the 2005 *Vulnerability Assessment of Chicken Nuggets/Patties Used in the National School Lunch Program* and in the organizational meeting of the catfish production system vulnerability assessment work group.
- Provided an educational station designed for elementary students who participated in the 2009 USDA Food Safety Education Camp, sponsored by FSIS and held in April at the George Washington Carver Center in Beltsville, MD.
- Assisted FSIS in the development and execution of a simulated flood disaster that included a foodborne illness event caused by a USDA Food that was served at a shelter.
- Represented FNS at a special meeting of the Food Sector Federal Inter-Agency Workgroup partners to preview and provide comments on a Department of Homeland Security Benchmarking Toolkit that will incorporate the school foodservice community into the final toolkit.

Outreach, Education, and Training

National Food Service Management Institute

FSS worked closely with NFSMI on food safety education and training for Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). Throughout the year, NFSMI presented three train-the-trainer sessions on emergency preparedness and food safety, with representatives from 20 states. NFSMI also presented other food safety education programs to 170 individuals from five states. Two assessment projects were initiated: one to determine the usefulness of food safety education materials from NFSMI; the other to determine the extent to which the food safety programs based on HACCP principles have been implemented. A task force will examine the NFSMI technical assistance service and suggest ways to improve it.

Presentations

Presentations allow FSS to reach a national audience of FNS Regional and State partners, FNS program operators, and industry groups at professional and educational meetings across the country to promote food safety and food defense in FNS nutrition assistance programs. The FSS presented at these meetings in 2009:

- National Center for Food Protection and Defense Annual Meeting
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Fall Conference for Child Nutrition Programs
- Texas Region 4 Child Nutrition Services Showcase
- American Peanut Council Spring Conference
- Special Nutrition Programs 2009 Southwest Regional Conference
- American Commodity Distribution Association Annual Meeting
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program Annual Meeting
- FNS Mid-Atlantic Region Special Nutrition Programs State Directors Conference
- School Nutrition Association Annual National Conference
- National Environmental Health Association Annual Education Conference
- Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Grantee Meeting

Partnerships

FSS disseminates messages about food safety and food defense in USDA's nutrition assistance programs through partnerships.

- Led the National Coalition for Food Safe Schools (NCFSS), an alliance of representatives from a variety of national organizations, professional associations, and government agencies
- Participated in the Partnership for Food Safety Education quarterly meetings as a federal stakeholder, worked on a subcommittee to develop materials on recall basics, and helped with annual planning.
- Member of the Steering Committee for the 2010 FSIS Food Safety Education Conference; contributed funding to the conference.
- Member of the Interagency Risk Assessment Consortium
- Member of the USDA Food Safety Risk Assessment Committee
- Participated in the USDA Sector Specific Plan Sub-Working Group as part of the National Infrastructure Protection Plan, which is coordinated by the Department of Homeland Security to provide a unifying structure for the

integration of critical infrastructures and key resources protection efforts into a single national program

- Participated on the Steering Committee of the CDC Environmental Health Service Network (EHS-Net)
- Member of the National Academies of Science Institute of Medicine Food Forum.

Publications

The FSS provided or reviewed articles for the following publications of partner groups:

- Article on *Salmonella* for the National Education Association Health Information Network newsletter
- Article on food allergies for the Food Distribution Division's *School Programs Commodity Update* newsletter
- Article on safety of fresh produce for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) newsletter
- Article review on providing school meals during H1N1-related school dismissals for the School Nutrition Association

Future Activities for 2010 and Beyond

Project Development: In fiscal year 2010, FSS will address the following initiatives:

- Assess current State Agency recall notification and communication processes and develop performance criteria to support a grants program in 2011 that will upgrade State Agency communication to local recipient agencies.
- Initiate evaluation and revision of the *Food Safe Schools Action Guide* to include food allergies and food defense.
- Complete the revision of USDA Hold and Recall Procedures.
- Establish a Center of Excellence for School Food Safety Research at a university that will conduct food safety research specific to school foodservice and other FNS nutrition assistance programs.
- Complete food defense tabletop exercises and develop toolkit for State Agencies and School Food Authorities that would meet DHS criteria for grant funding.
- Complete a Memorandum of Agreement with FDA to improve communication between FDA and USDA (FNS, AMS, and FSA) regarding USDA Foods.

Education and Training:

- Work with the NFSMI to develop and disseminate educational materials addressing effective cooling practices in school foodservice programs, food allergies, employee health and hygiene for school foodservice and child care employees, produce safety, inventory tracking and management, and norovirus.
- Begin training at Produce Safety University in collaboration with AMS to teach State Agencies and school foodservice directors and operators about the safe handling of fresh produce in schools.
- Train State Distributing Agencies and local Recipient Agencies on the new food recall education and guidance materials once they are developed.