

*Preparing Small and Very Small Meat and Poultry Establishments
for the Future of HACCP: A Cooperative Approach*

Group III: Scientific/Technical Assistance: Availability, Need, and Application

1. What kinds of technical assistance do small plant operators need?

Key Points noted in discussion:

It would be beneficial to have more approved standardized procedures or “safe harbors” such as Appendix A and B. In addition, standard “approved” HACCP record keeping forms (monitoring, pre-shipment review, verification) would be helpful.

Additional points of discussion:

- FSIS consistency needs to be improved, district manager needs to reconcile inspector differences
- FSIS needs to provide more technical assistance
- Small plants don't know how to write an appeal, scared to write an appeal
- Need for research on validated processes for unusual products
- Understanding how research on “x” applies to product “y”
- Templates may not always apply, education is needed, plants don't always know their own plan

Availability of Scientific/Technical Assistance

2. Do you know where to find the scientific/technical assistance and information you need?

Key Points noted in discussion:

Yes, word of mouth, trade publication, other processors.

3. Where do small plant operators go for technical assistance? Who do they contact?

- ***Do you make use of the FSIS Policy Development Division of the Office of Policy, Program and Employee Development? (This was formerly known as the Technical Service Center (TSC).)***
- ***Does the TSC provide you with the information or assistance you need?***
- ***Have you used the TSC? Describe your experience with the TSC.***
- ***Do you make use of IKEs (Interactive Knowledge Exchanges)?***

Key Points noted in discussion:

Nebraska tech center very helpful.

Additional points of discussion:

- Start with inspectors, state inspectors are more helpful than state inspectors
- Small processors need more help dealing with overwhelming information on the web
- AskFSIS, AAMP, suppliers, customers, networking with other processors
- IKE timing is improving, needs more follow-up

4. Review web site resources with computer. Are you aware of these? Do you use them? Why or why not?

- **The FSIS website as a source of technical information: can you find the information you need? If not, what was the information that you needed, but could not find?**
- **Small Plant News, newsletter**
- **Ask FSIS**
- **University of Wisconsin site, Ohio State University site, other university/extension sites**

Key Points noted in discussion:

The industry is not computer literate enough in many cases. Even those that may have computer access, often don't have high speed internet. FSIS inspectors may be only point of contact for many very small plants. Inspectors need approval and expertise to provide assistance.

Additional points of discussion:

- Small Plant News is dated information
- Wisconsin website is very useful

5. Tell us what you know and what you think about the FSIS Small plant Contact/Coordinator program?

Key Points noted in discussion:

The FSIS Small plant Contact/Coordinator program is good, but FSIS should devote some effort to continue to keep the program active and keeping the Contact/Coordinator more informed. FSIS also should explore ways in which trade associations can be involved in the Contact/Coordinator program. The Contact/Coordinator program would be more effective if universities were involved PRIOR to information being shared with small plants (or at least at the same time). When FSIS informs small plants about a change, and the small plant calls the state contact for more information, but the state contact has no idea what the small plant is talking about because FSIS hasn't shared that same information with the contacts, this makes FSIS and the Contact/Coordinator's look foolish.

6. Is there a university/extension food science or animal science department you can call on for help in your state?

- **What kinds of services do these programs provide?**
- **What recommendations do you have to improve these services?**

Key Points noted in discussion:

Universities left out of the loop, Trade associations left out of the loop. They need to receive the same information at the same time as plants/inspectors in order to respond in a timely fashion.

The participants suggested that there be a partnership between trade associations and universities. This may help to increase training session attendance. Concerns about training include cost of training, need for funding to support training, ability to develop training materials in a timely fashion, need for consistent training messages, using AskFSIS as a resource.

Additional points of discussion:

- It would be helpful to share best practices within the industry.

7. Are there consultants known to you who can provide scientific/technical assistance?

- *Have you used these services?*
- *If so, what type of services do these individuals provide?*
- *What recommendations do you have to improve these services?*

Key Points noted in discussion:

There are issues with respect to listing consultants on the FSIS website: cannot appear to endorse consultants.

Additional points of discussion:

- Everyone knows of several, HACCP, micro sampling, processing authority
- The issue of variable quality between consultants was discussed. The idea of a formal “certification” program for HACCP or process authority consultants was discussed. This idea has merits, but practical implementation issues are not trivial.

8. Can you get help from industry organizations (ie. AAMP, AMI)?

- *What services do they provide?*
- *What recommendations do you have to improve these services?*

Key Points noted in discussion:

AAMP is helpful and very affordable. Some limitations in sharing information from a peer reviewed publication (copyright issues—who “owns” the information?).

Additional points of discussion:

- AMI is similar to AAMP but more expensive, but serving larger companies.

9. Are there regional disparities in the availability of technical assistance?

Key Points noted in discussion:

Yes, due to inspector differences, due to university differences as well.

New Technologies Information and Research

10. Are there some areas where new technologies might be needed in order to improve the safety of meat and poultry products?

Key Points noted in discussion:

- Participants believe they are up to speed on existing technologies
- Antimicrobial research is needed (lactate and diacetate)
- Natural and organic preservatives are needed
- Post packaging pasteurization research needed

11. Are there some suggested research needs for technologies needed to improve the safety of meat and poultry products?

Key Points noted in discussion:

- Easy, affordable, easily monitored, all natural, 100 effective
- Computer models, but need training and tutorials

12. Who is doing research in this area?

Key Points noted in discussion:

In order to have a better knowledge/awareness who is doing research in this area, FSIS should maintain a list of state contacts, make it easier to locate resources, USDA ARS. IIC (Inspector-in-charge) needs to be aware of this list. Create a list like the HACCP contact list.

13. Where is funding coming from? What funding needs exist?

Key Points noted in discussion:

USDA CSREES is a major source of funding.

Additional points of discussion:

- AMI foundation
- NCBA
- Industry
- SVSPO no longer funds research
- Need funding to support purchase of data loggers, water activity meters

Specific Assistance with Critical Control Point Determination, Verification and Validation

10. Where can small plant operators go for help in determining Critical Control Points?

Key Points noted in discussion:

- Inspector and universities are sources
- Need for database, update of Ohio state document

11. For what types of products is there a need for more CCP and validation documentation?

Key Points noted in discussion:

- Beef jerky
- Ethnic products (soujuk, basterma, boudin)
- Specialty salami's (dried salamia, RTE chorizo)
- Niche products, but process validation is missing
- Whole muscle dried products

12. Is there a need for more statistical assistance regarding testing and validation of testing methods?

Key Points noted in discussion:

There is a very clear need for this assistance. AAMP SPC computer program is easy to use. We still have additional needs for recommended/required testing frequency assistance.

13. Often plant operators are urged to refer to scientific journal articles for research that validates a process or procedure they want to use in their plant.

- **Is this a realistic option?**
- **Why or why not?**

Key Points noted in discussion:

It might be possible to take a related article, and justify a decision based on technical expertise.

Additional points of discussion:

- If different (process or product, article might not be helpful)
- What if EIAOs are not able to make a decision?

14. How can the information in scientific journals be made to be more useful to the plant operator who needs to justify process, CCP and validation procedures?

Key Points noted in discussion:

- Provide translation of articles in layman's terms (even just C vs. F)
- Copyright issues, local libraries

15. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the availability, delivery and use of scientific/technical assistance?

Key Points noted in discussion:

The agency (FSIS) needs to be aware of the diversity within small and very small plants. Small business has entire business to lose.

Additional points of discussion:

- Agency is trying to move toward making decisions based on volume of product sold.
- Some issues with confidentiality