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USDA Targeting Six Additional Strains of E.coli in Raw Beef Trim Starting Monday

Action represents another significant food safety measure under the Obama Administration

WASHINGTON, May 31, 2012 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) next week will begin instituting a zero-tolerance policy for six additional strains of E. coli that are responsible for human illness. Beginning Monday, FSIS will routinely test raw beef manufacturing trim, which is a major component of ground beef, for the six additional strains of E. coli. Trim found to be contaminated with these pathogens will not be allowed into commerce and will be subject to recall.

Illnesses due to E. coli serogroups other than O157:H7, which caused a high-profile illness outbreak in 1993, outnumber those attributed to O157:H7. FSIS declared O157:H7 an adulterant in 1994.

"These strains of E. coli are an emerging threat to human health and the steps we are taking today are entirely focused on preventing Americans from suffering foodborne illnesses," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "We cannot ignore the evidence that these pathogens are a threat in our nation's food supply."

The additional strains that will be treated as adulterants beginning today are Shiga-toxin producing E. coli (STEC) serogroups O26, O45, O103, O111, O121 and O145. Like E. coli O157:H7, these serogroups can cause severe illness and even death, and young children and the elderly are at highest risk.

Today's action is in addition to other significant public health measures FSIS has put in place during President Barack Obama's Administration to date to safeguard the food supply, prevent foodborne illness, and improve consumers' knowledge about the food they eat. These initiatives support the

three core principles developed by the President's Food Safety Working Group: prioritizing prevention; strengthening surveillance and enforcement; and improving response and recovery. Some of these actions include:

- Test-and-hold policy that will significantly reduce consumer exposure to unsafe meat products, should the policy become final, because products cannot be released into commerce until Agency test results for dangerous contaminants are known.
- Labeling requirements that provide better information to consumers about their food by requiring nutrition information for single-ingredient raw meat and poultry products and ground or chopped products.
- Public Health Information System, a modernized, comprehensive database with information on public health trends and food safety violations at the nearly 6,100 plants FSIS regulates.
- Performance standards for poultry establishments for continued reductions in the occurrence of pathogens. After two years of enforcing the new standards, FSIS estimates that approximately 5,000 illnesses will be prevented each year under the new *Campylobacter* standards, and approximately 20,000 illnesses will be prevented under the revised *Salmonella* standards each year.

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