DC 20503, and to Linda McDonald, FSA, APFO, USDA, 2222 West 2300 South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84119–2020.

OMB is required to make a decision concerning the collection of information contained in these proposed regulations between 30 and 60 days after publication of this document in the **Federal Register**. Therefore, a comment to OMB is best assured of having its full effect if OMB receives in within 30 days of publication.

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Signed at Washington, DC on October 19, 1997.

Bruce R. Weber,

Acting Administrator, Farm Service Agency.

[FR Doc. 97–28303 Filed 10–24–97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–05–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

[Docket No. 97–057N]

Notice of Change in Inspection Procedures; Adoption of a Hands-off Inspection Procedure for Lambs

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: In response to a request from the American Sheep Industry Association, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is changing its inspection procedures for lambs. Currently, inspectors palpate the carcasses of lambs for the purpose of detecting and removing carcasses with diseases such as Caseous lymphadenitis. Under the new procedure, there will be hands-off inspection of lambs in order to reduce the risk and hands-on inspection methods may spread or add microbial contamination to carcasses.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Alice Thaler, Chief, Concepts & Design Branch, Inspection Methods Development Division, Office of Policy, Program Development, and Evaluation, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250–3700; telephone, (202) 205–0005.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Traditionally, meat inspectors have palpated the carcasses of lambs as part of their post-mortem evaluation of these animals. The American Sheep Industry Association recommended that we end this practice for food safety reasons. The primary justification for this long-standing hands-on inspection procedure was to detect and remove carcasses with diseases such as Caseous lymphadenitis.

In determining the desirability of such a procedure for lambs, FSIS considered two questions: (1) Will diseased carcasses of parts be more likely to reach consumers in a hands-off system?; and (2) Are current hands-on inspection methods likely to be spreading or adding contamination to carcasses?

Comparing Hands-on and Hands-off Procedures

The first issue deals with the benefits of a hands-on system. What is the risk that a diseased carcass or diseased parts would be passed for food and reach the consumer if FSIS instituted a hands-off inspection procedure?

The second issue was to determine whether current inspection techniques used on lambs cause inspectors to spread or add contamination to carcasses. Although there is no data on this specific question, we believe that data from other food handling and health care industries indicate that the hands-on procedures could contaminate lamb carcasses or spread such contamination.

Caseous lymphadenitis is the primary disease detected by carcass palpation, and it is not a public health concern. In the United States, there are six plants that slaughter 80 percent of the lambs. From Fiscal Years 1987 to 1996, these six plants slaughtered 26,347,480 lambs and yearlings. (Present data do not distinguish between lambs and yearlings.) The plants condemned 1,203 animals in the same 10-year period for Caseous lymphadenitis, a 0.0046 percent condemnation rate. It is unknown how many carcasses were detected on post-mortem and trimmed, and then passed for food.

Seven of the diseases routinely present in lambs are of public health concern: Actinobacillosis, Campylobacteriosis, Contagious ecthyma, Echinococcosis, Leptospirosis, Salmonella dysentery, and Toxoplasmosis. However, none of them require carcass palpation for diagnosis.

The American Sheep Industry Association believes that hands-on inspection methods spread or add contamination to carcasses, including pathogenci microorganisms such as *Escherichia coli* 0157:H7 and *Salmonella*. The Agenc7y evaluated existing information to determine its adequacy and reviewed literature regarding the documented spread of contamination by hands in other industries. (See References at end of document.) Evidence from other food handling and health care industries supports these concerns. (Gould and Ream 1996; Wenzel and Pulverer 1995). FSIS accepts the documentation in allied fields, which argues that the palpation of lamb carcasses is inconsistent with our food safety philosophy that FSIS must return carcasses presented for inspection with unchanged or lower food safety risk factors.

Conclusion

The primary reason for carcass palpation in lambs is to detect Caseous lymphadenitis. This disease is not in public health concern and has an extremely low condemnation rate. Although it has not been proven directly that palpation by inspectors causes microbial contamination or actually spreads such contamination, compelling evidence from allied industries indicates that hands do spread or add microorganisms. The risk of contamination using a hands-on procedure exceeds the risk of diseased carcasses being missed using a hands-off procedure for lambs.

Therefore, FSIS is proceeding to adopt a hands-off inspection method for lambs. This process involves a number of steps, including consultation with employee organizations. FSIS intends to complete the process within the next 12 months.

FSIS will monitor condemnation rates in the six plants to identify the impact, if any, of the change. Further, the Agency intends to look at the implications of hands-of inspection procedures with regard to the production of all meat and poultry products.

Done at Washington, DC, on October 17, 1997.

Thomas J. Billy,

Administrator.

References

1. Snider, O.P., Jr., HACCP—An Industry Food Safety Self-Control Program—Part VI, Dairy Food & Environ. Sanitation, June 1992; 12(6):362–365.

2. Almeida, R.C., Kuaye, A.Y., Serrano, A.M., de Almeida, P.F., Evaluation and Control of the Microbiological Quality of Hands in Food Handlers, Revista de Saude Publica (Brazil), Aug. 1995; 29(4):290–4.

3. Bell, R.G., Hathaway, S.C., The Hygienic Efficiency of Conventional and Inverted Lamb Dressing Systems. Journal of Applied Bacteriology (New Zealand). Sep. 1996; 81(3):225–34AB.

4. Gould, D., Ream, E., Nurses' Infection-control Practice: Hand Decontamination, the Use of Gloves and Sharp Instruments. International Journal of Nursing Studies (U.K.). Apr. 1996; 33(2):143–60AB.

5. Wenzel, R., Pulverer, G., Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus homiletics* on the Hands of Health Care Workers: A Route of Transmission or a Source? Journal of Hospital Infection (Germany). Nov. 1995; 31(3):195–120AB.

6. Kaltenthaler, E.C., Elsworth, A.M., Schweiger, M.S. Mara, D.D., Brfaunholttz, D.A., Faecal Contamination on Children's Hands and Environmental Surfaces in Primary Schools in Leeds. Epidemiology and Infection (U.K.). Dec. 1995; 115(3):527–34.

7. Sengupta, P.G., Sicar, B.K., Mandal, S.K. Mukhopadhyay, A.K., Nair, G.B., *et al.*, Epidemiology of *Vibro cholerae* 0139 with Special References to Intrafamilial Transmission in Calcutta. Journal of Infection (India). Jul. 1995; 31(1):45–7.

8. Gerding, D.N., Johnson, S., Peterson, L.R., Mulligan, M.E., Silva, J.A., Jr., *Clostridium difficile*-Associated Diarrhea and Colitis. Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology, Aug. 1995; 457–77AB.

9. Urano, T., Noguchi, K., Jiang, G., Tsukumi, K., Survey of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* Contamination in Human Beings and Laboratory Animals. Experimental Animals (Japan). Jul. 1995; 44(3):233–9.

[FR Doc. 97–28366 Filed 10–24–97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–DM–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, Canal Hoya Timber Sale, Tongass National Forest, Stikine Area, Wrangell, Alaska

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of intent; revision.

SUMMARY: The Department of Agriculture, Forest Service will prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Canal Hoya Timber Sale located on the Stikine Area of the Tongass National Forest. This Notice of Intent revises the Notice of Intent published December 23, 1996 (page 67530) by describing changes to the purpose and need and the schedule for decision. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement is being prepared to respond to the new management direction and standards and guidelines of the Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) released in May 1997.

ADDRESSES: Written comments, suggestions or questions concerning the analysis and Environmental Impact Statement should be sent to Scott Posner, Canal Hoya Team Leader, Wrangell Ranger District, Stikine Area, Tongass National Forest, P.O. Box 51, Wrangell, Alaska, 99929, phone (907) 874–2323.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Canal Hoya Study Area includes Value Comparison Unit 520 and 521 on the mainland in Southeast Alaska, approximately 30 miles southeast of Wrangell, Alaska.

The Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of May 1997 provides the overall guidance (land use designations, goals, objectives, management prescriptions, standards and guidelines) to achieve the desired future condition for the area in which this project is proposed. This revised Forest Plan allocates portions of the study area to two management prescriptions; Timber Production and Modified Landscape. The new standards and guidelines in the revised Forest Plan provide increased protection for riparian areas, beach fringe, brown bear foraging areas and wetland soils, which affect the assumptions on which the purpose and need in the original Notice of Intent were based.

The purpose and need for the project is to respond to the goals and objectives identified by the Forest Plan for the timber resource and to move the Canal Hoya Study Area towards the desired future condition. The Forest Plan identified the following goals and objectives: (1) manage the timber resource for production of saw timber and other wood products from suitable timber lands made available for timber harvest, on an even-flow, long-term sustained yield basis and in an economically efficient manner (Revised Forest Plan page 2–4; (2) seek to provide a timber supply sufficient to meet the annual market demand for Tongass National Forest timber, and the demand for the planning cycle (page 2–4); and 3) maintain and promote industrial wood production from suitable timber lands, providing a continuous supply of wood to meet society's needs (page 3–144). The Canal Hoya Timber Sale will be designed to produce desired resource values, products, and conditions in ways that also sustain the diversity and productivity of ecosystems (page 2–1).

The Canal Hoya Timber Sale is now expected to provide a range of volume to the timber industry from 10 to 17 million board feet. The range of alternatives to be considered in the Environmental Impact Statement will be determined during analysis and reflect issues raised during scoping.

The Proposed Action provides for: (1) construction of approximately 10 miles of specified road and additional temporary road; (2) harvest of approximately 750 acres of timber; and, (3) construction of a log transfer facility east of the Canal Creek estuary and another log transfer facility east of the Hoya Creek estuary. The log transfer facilities could use a floating, removable structure. This level of development would result in the harvest of approximately 14 million board feet of sawlog and utility timber volume.

A number of public comments have been received on this project. Based on comments from the public and other agencies during the scoping effort, the following significant issues have been identified. How will the design of the sale affect:

(1) Harvest economics?

(2) Scenic and tourism values?

(3) Bears that also use the Anan Wildlife Viewing Area?

(4) Wildlife habitat and species conservation?

(5) Freshwater and marine resources?

(6) Forest soils?

These issues were used to design alternatives to the proposed action and to identify the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives. The draft Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled for publication in January 1998 and the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision is scheduled for publication in May 1998.

The Forest Service believes, at this stage, it is important to alert reviewers about several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of Draft Environmental Impact Statements must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts an agency to the reviewer's position and contentions (*Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp.* v. *NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553, 1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the Draft Environmental Impact Statement stage but that are not raised until after completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement may be waived or dismissed by the courts (*City of Angoon* v. *Hodel*, 803 F.2d 1016, 1022, 9th Cir. 1986; and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc.* v. *Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338, E.D. Wis. 1980). Because of these court rulings, it is important that those interested in this proposed action participate by the close of the draft Environmental Impact Statement 45 day comment period so that substantive comments and objections are made available to the Forest Service at a time when it can meaningfully consider them and respond to them in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

No other revisions are made to the original Notice of Intent published December 23, 1996.

Patricia A. Grantham,

Acting Forest Supervisor, Stikine Area.

[FR Doc. 97–28384 Filed 10–24–97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–11–M