



Consumer Federation of America

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 20, 2012

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Today USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service announced that the agency will be expanding its controversial HACCP-Based Inspection Models Project (HIMP) to allow all poultry slaughter plants to participate on a voluntary basis. Consumer Federation of America has several concerns with this announcement.

There has been no thorough independent review of HIMP since 2001 when the GAO reviewed the program and raised serious concerns about the data presented by FSIS to justify the program. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand recently asked GAO to conduct a review of HIMP so that the public could be provided with an assessment of the program before expansion of the program was considered. FSIS' announcement today pre-empts any independent review.

FSIS testing data on Salmonella in HIMP plants shows that while some plants do exceed the standard, others do not. Even more troubling is FSIS's recent admission that plants may temporarily change their food safety processes during FSIS verification sampling. In a notice to inspectors, FSIS noted that plants may be increasing chlorine levels in poultry chillers to levels not supported under the plant's HACCP plan prior to or during FSIS sampling for Salmonella and then returning to normal chlorine levels after FSIS sampling is completed. Such activities could lead to different levels of contamination, and therefore different sampling results, than what might occur in the plant's operation on a day-to-day operation.

FSIS has no data on plant performance in reducing Campylobacter because the agency has never tested for Campylobacter. It was only last year when the agency proposed new performance standards for Salmonella and Campylobacter and testing to those new standards has barely begun. So consumers have no assurance that plants under HIMP can meet the new standards. It is unclear whether plants which are unable to meet the new standards will be allowed to continue operating under HIMP. Participation under HIMP will provide plants with certain advantages such as increased line speeds. Plants that are unable to meet the new performance standards for reducing pathogens should not be permitted to continue to enjoy those advantages.

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Consumer Federation of America is a non-profit association of some 300 consumer organizations, established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy.