

**Statement of Dan Engeljohn, PhD, Assistant Administrator
Food Safety and Inspection Service, Office of Field Operations
United State Department of Agriculture
Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China
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Chairman Brown, Co-Chairman Smith, and members of the Commission, I am Dr. Dan Engeljohn, Assistant Administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service's Office of Field Operations. I am pleased to appear before you today to explain the current state of U.S. regulatory oversight of poultry exported from the People's Republic of China (PRC) for human food.

Our Mission

First, let me take some time to explain FSIS's mandate. By law, FSIS is required to examine and inspect all slaughtered and processed livestock and poultry, as well as all processed egg products produced for use in commerce for human consumption. Our inspectors and veterinarians monitor the health of the animals brought to slaughter and ensure that livestock are treated humanely. These inspectors also collect the samples that our scientists analyze for the presence of pathogens and illegal drug residues. These dedicated men and women are on the front lines nationwide enforcing regulations and directives backed by scientific evidence to ensure that meat, poultry, and processed eggs in commerce are safe and wholesome.

FSIS also regulates all imported meat, poultry, and processed egg products intended for use as human food through a three part process:

- First, before FSIS-regulated products can enter the country, the agency determines whether the food safety regulatory system of any country that wishes to export to the United States is equivalent to our own system.
- Second, once FSIS finds a foreign country's food safety system to be equivalent, FSIS re-inspects eligible products from that country at U.S. ports-of-entry. During FY 2013,

FSIS personnel inspected approximately 3 billion pounds of meat and poultry products presented for import by 28 actively exporting foreign countries, as well as about 10 million pounds of processed egg products.

- Third and finally, FSIS evaluates an exporting country's food safety system on an ongoing basis. Each year, FSIS reviews any changes in the foreign country's food safety system.

In addition, FSIS may conduct an in-country audit of the system and will review the country's performance in port-of-entry inspections. Based on these reviews, the Agency decides whether the country is maintaining equivalence, or whether additional Agency action is warranted. This performance-based approach allows FSIS to direct its resources to foreign food regulatory systems that potentially pose a risk to public health and makes our international program more consistent with the U.S. domestic inspection system. Our approach improves the linkage between port-of-entry re-inspection and on-site audits.

Regulatory Oversight

Again, let me assure you that FSIS follows every mandate given the Agency to ensure that our food supply is safe. FSIS audits any foreign country that wishes to export meat, poultry, or processed egg products to the United States. A foreign country's inspection system must ensure that establishments preparing to export to the United States comply with requirements equivalent to those in the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, the Egg Products Inspection Act, and in FSIS regulations. This is true for the PRC as it would be for any other country.

As you know, pursuant to requirements in the fiscal year 2010 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (PL 111-80), the Agency is also required to provide Congress with detailed updates on China's request for equivalency every six months. However, let me explain briefly where we are in the process for

the PRC – a process that began in 2004 with the PRC’s request for on-site FSIS audits of its poultry processing and slaughter system.

- First, the United States is not importing any chicken that was slaughtered in China. A March 2013 audit found China’s **poultry slaughter** system **not** equivalent to that in the United States; and
- Second, FSIS reaffirmed in August 2013 that the PRC’s **poultry processing** inspection system **is** equivalent to that of the United States. This means that chicken slaughtered in the U.S. or another country whose poultry slaughter system has been found by FSIS to be equivalent to the U.S. system could be sent to China for processing and then exported to the United States.

Again, the only chicken currently permitted to be imported from China is processed chicken from approved sources. FSIS, in coordination with USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), also currently requires that all processed chicken products from China be cooked.

China has provided a list of four plants it has certified as eligible to export processed chicken to the United States. Before any processed chicken can be exported to the United States, a proper export health certificate must be developed by the PRC and approved by FSIS and APHIS. Such a certificate, a draft of which was submitted earlier this month, must demonstrate that the poultry is sourced from the United States or from a country with an inspection system for slaughter that is equivalent to that of the United States and that the poultry was cooked to a proper temperature, among other things. Once FSIS and APHIS approve a certificate, and that certificate is agreed to by the PRC, the PRC will then be able to determine when to begin shipping products from the plants certified to export processed poultry products to the United States. The Agency doesn’t have any information about how much processed product it expects China to ship once certification is up and running.

In addition to carrying a proper certificate, product must be properly labeled. Under Poultry Products Inspection Act regulations at 9 CFR 381.205, immediate containers of poultry products imported into the United States for human consumption must bear a label showing the name of the country of origin. Because processed product from China must be cooked, FSIS believes that it is unlikely that the product would be repacked or further processed in this country. If a product is not repacked or further processed, the label would indicate that the product is from the PRC. If the product were to be repacked or further processed in the United States at an official establishment, it would not include information that such product was from the PRC, but it would be repacked or processed under FSIS inspection. However, I would like to emphasize again that our systems-based approach to equivalence is designed to assure Americans that the food safety systems of other countries that FSIS finds to be equivalent, including the PRC's, are effective.

Of course, FSIS will also conduct annual on-site audits of the PRC's inspection system for processed poultry for at least the next 3 years, as we would do for any country that has just been found to be equivalent.

Conclusion

The dedicated men and women of FSIS work every day toward a common and extremely important goal of preventing food-borne illness. We take our mission seriously and understand the importance of our roles in ensuring the safety of the nation's food supply – whether from domestic or from foreign establishments.

Thank you for your continued support and the opportunity to report on the work we do to protect public health.

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