MEMORANDUM FOR AMI INSPECTION COMMITTEE

FROM: SKIP SEWARD

SUBJECT: NACMCF - CONSUMER GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE COOKING OF POULTRY PRODUCTS

The National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF) adopted a response to questions posed by the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) regarding improving the safety of cooking guidance given to consumers, particularly as they apply to raw or partially cooked poultry products that may be frozen or refrigerated and sold to consumers. The following are the highlights of the NACMCF document that is now posted at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/NACMCF_Report_Safe_Cooking_Poultry_032406.pdf.

- NACMCF reviewed the advantages and limitations of various types of cooking processes and labeling practices for non ready-to-eat (NRTE) and RTE products and the effect of those practices on product safety
- NACMCF concluded that variables such as product composition, geometry, temperature before cooking, crust formation, use of thermometers by consumers, and cooking equipment can affect the lethality of the prescribed cooking process
- NACMCF provided recommendations for the consumer and for processors
  - Processors should label the poultry product as NRTE or RTE
  - Principal display panels should clearly indicate whether the product is raw or not, especially if the NRTE product appears, or could appear to be RTE
  - Labels need to explicitly state that a product contains uncooked poultry and must be thoroughly cooked when the product contains uncooked poultry, especially if the product could be confused with a RTE product
  - “cooking” should be used for NRTE products and “heating” should be used for RTE products; if a “preferred method” is given for consumers, then the method should be stated clearly as being for “quality” and be validated for safety
  - Processors must validate the cooking instructions taking into account consumer interpretation of the label’s cooking instructions and actual implementation of the
instructions (Note: no guidance was given as to what the criteria are for these validation activities; at the recent FSIS-industry meeting, Dr. Engeljohn, FSIS, indicated that this was up to the processor to determine – could be a problem in the field or at the Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff office with acceptance of validations done by a processor)

- Validation must consider limitations such as variations in temperature measurement (assuming a consumer uses a thermometer), and heating by equipment such as microwave ovens
- Table 1 of the NACMCF document compares many of the cooking processes used by consumers to cook poultry, with advantages, limitations and comments provided for each method; this should be a useful tool when processors assess their cooking instructions and accompanying labels
- Regardless of the type or size of poultry product, the time and temperature for reaching the 165 °F end-point temperature must apply to the slowest heating part of the product
- Processors need to validate cooking instructions that take into account different pre-cooking preparation procedures, e.g., thawing of the product before cooking vs. cooking the product from the frozen state
- NACMCF also provided a list of recommendations for FSIS with regard to consumer education messages

As always, if you have any further questions or comments, please let me know (202-587-4249 or sseward@meatami.com).

cc: P.BOYLE
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