USDA’s new initiative to reduce Listeria monocytogenes

The USDA released an administrative directive last week (Release No. 0478.02) outlining new initiatives to strengthen current Listeria protocols and testing programs. Specifically, the directive focuses on additional steps to be taken by the USDA inspectors to ensure that establishments producing ready-to-eat meat and poultry products are taking the necessary steps to prevent Listeria contamination. Under this directive, plants producing high and medium risk ready-to-eat products (deli-meats and hot dogs) that do not have an evaluated environmental testing regime to find and take necessary actions to eliminate Listeria monocytogenes (those plants that test for Listeria, but do not share the results with FSIS), will be placed under an intensified testing program by the FSIS. Intensified testing program will consist of:

1. Increased testing of the final product
2. Testing of food contact surfaces
3. Testing plant environment

Establishments that share complete Listeria data from their environmental testing with FSIS will be subjected to targeted testing program, which consists of final product testing.

The new Listeria monocytogenes directive is available on FSIS’s web site at: http://www.fsis.usda.gov

The comment period on the directive is Dec. 2, 2002. After FSIS review of comments and necessary modification, the directive will be implemented beginning Dec. 9, 2002.

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