PROCESSING TIP...

USDA-FSIS SALMONELLA TESTING

According to the new United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service's (USDA-FSIS) regulations implemented in 1998, poultry slaughter facilities must be evaluated for Salmonella on a random, intermittent basis. A USDA Inspector in Charge (IIC) will receive notification that he or she should begin testing and the following will occur:

1. One carcass per day will be selected, rinsed, and the rinse will be tested by the USDA-FSIS for the presence of Salmonella.
2. Carcasses will be selected and tested for approximately 51 processing days or until 51 carcasses have been evaluated. In some cases, samples must be discarded and more samples are taken. For example, if samples are temperature abused or lost during shipment, they would not be tested.
3. Thirteen or more positives out of 51 samples (> 23.5 %) results in a failure.
4. Once the first failure occurs, the plant is given 30 days to make corrections, and the testing series (51 samples) begins again.
5. After a second failure, the company must write an action plan detailing corrective actions that will be taken to prevent the problem from recurring.
6. Testing resumes 30 days after the second testing series has been completed.
7. Once the third failure has occurred, inspection will be withdrawn for approximately 2-3 months, which effectively closes the processing plant. This action by the USDA results in layoffs, loss of reputation, and lost business. In addition, flocks must be sold to another processor.

In 1999, we were contacted by 7 processing facilities that received two failures for Salmonella. In all cases, the companies, once they had received the first failure, made internal adjustments and attempted to correct the problems without the aid of external assistance. Unlike situations in which other pathogenic bacteria are involved, such as with Listeria or E. coli O157:H7, Salmonella problems are almost impossible to solve by attempting a "stomp out the forest fire" type of approach.
Salmonella problems must be dealt with by thorough investigation of the entire operation, from the breeders all the way through the end of the slaughter process. If any "link" in the chain is not dealt with, Salmonella problems may remain and further failures may occur. Thus, it is essential that when problems are encountered, the company respond immediately by seeking external expert assistance.

Thirty days between the testing series is insufficient for many problems to be dealt with adequately. For example, in one facility, the scalder was identified as causing the Salmonella problem. The company decided to order a new scalder to replace the old, outdated, and inefficient one. When ordering this system, the manufacturer told the company that it would require 12 weeks to build the scalder. Upon receipt of the new scalder, it had to be installed, which required time as well. From this example, it is easy to see that when a poultry company receives a Salmonella failure, they should immediately seek as much help as possible to rapidly correct the situation. In general, Salmonella problems do not disappear by themselves and in some cases require drastic intervention that may take months to implement.

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**Consult with your poultry company representative before making management changes.**

“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”