

Survey of Food Safety and Inspection Service Inspectors' Perceptions of COVID-19 Safety in the Work Environment



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SUBJECT: Survey of Food Safety and Inspection Service Inspectors' Perceptions of COVID-19 Safety in the Work Environment

This product presents the results of the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) February – March 2021 pulse survey of Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspectors to obtain information about how FSIS frontline inspectors perceive coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) safety in their work environments. The survey consisted of 52 questions and was distributed by OIG to 7,065 FSIS inspectors. The survey remained open for 2 weeks and there was a 39 percent response rate.

The product contains OIG's presentation of the survey results. FSIS' written response to the draft is included in its entirety at the end of the product. OIG applied the established Office of Analytics and Innovation quality assurance standards to ensure the information presented in this product is adequately supported.

We appreciate the courtesies and cooperation extended to us by members of your staff during the survey development and execution process. The product contains publicly available information and will be posted in its entirety to our website (<http://www.usda.gov/oig>) in the near future.

Attachment

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Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted a pulse survey of Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspectors to obtain information about how FSIS frontline inspectors perceive coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) safety in their work environments.

On February 22, 2021, OIG began the COVID-19 safety survey, which consisted of 52 questions and was sent by OIG to 7,065 FSIS inspectors. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary, and responses were anonymous. The survey closed on March 5, 2021. This report presents the results of the survey.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the inspectors' responses to the survey.

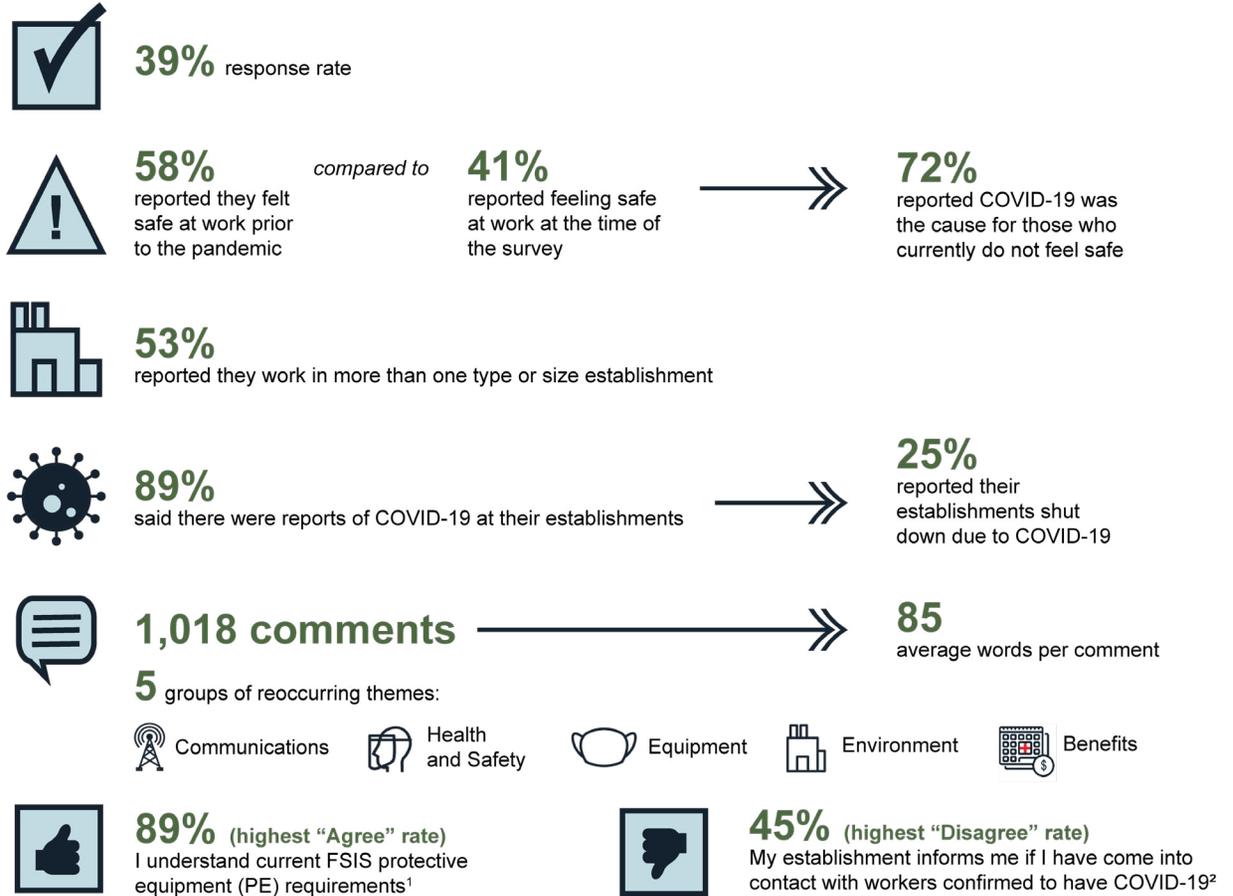


Figure 1. Overview of Survey Responses

¹ In this report, the terms, acronyms, and phrases "PE" and "personal protective equipment" (or "PPE") are used interchangeably.

² This is the highest rate for responses not significantly restricted by skip logic, i.e., for responses attributable to the population, and not a subset, of respondents.

Background and Objective

In December 2019, a novel (new) coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2 was first detected in the People's Republic of China, causing outbreaks of COVID-19 that spread globally. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced the COVID-19 outbreak could be characterized as a pandemic, as the rates of infection continued to rise around the world, including the United States. The President of the United States declared that the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States constituted a national emergency, beginning March 1, 2020.³

Multiple outbreaks of COVID-19 among meat and poultry processing facility workers occurred in the United States which led the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) of the Department of Labor to issue interim guidance on April 26, 2020, specifically for meat and poultry processing workers

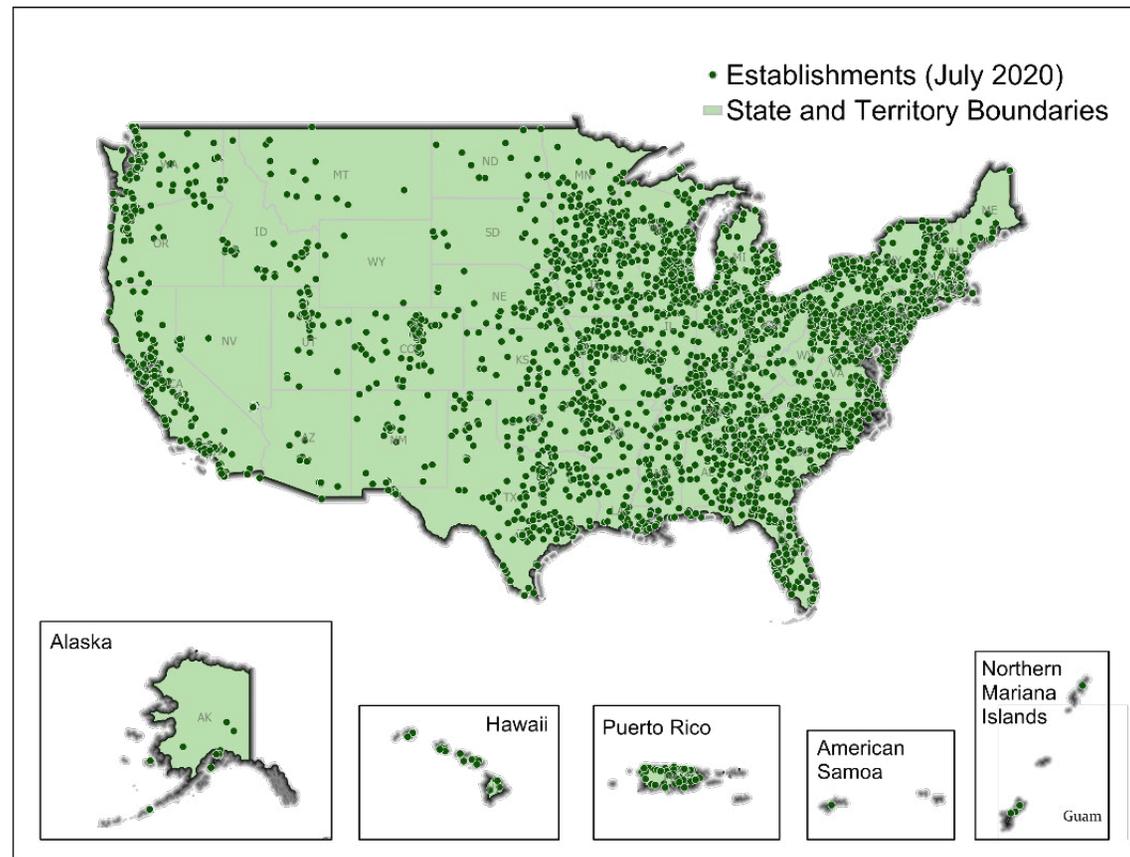


Figure 2. Geographic Distribution of Elements

³ Proclamation 9994 of March 13, 2020 (Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak), 85 Fed. Reg. 15337 (Mar. 18, 2020).

Background and Objective, continued

and employers.⁴ This guidance varied from the guidance given to the general public because the facilities were considered critical infrastructure.

FSIS, the public health regulatory agency within USDA, is authorized to inspect all meat and poultry products sold through interstate commerce to ensure that U.S. food safety standards are met and that the animals are fit for human consumption. To accomplish this, FSIS employs about 8,700 employees. FSIS inspection personnel are responsible for monitoring, inspecting, verifying, and enforcing regulations on meat, poultry, and egg products in over 6,000 establishments (see Figure 2 on previous page). While FSIS inspectors work in the establishments, they are not establishment employees nor are they considered to be “meat and poultry processing workers.”

According to a CDC report released on July 7, 2020, at least 17,358 COVID-19 cases and 91 COVID-19-related deaths had occurred among U.S. meat and poultry processing workers through May 31, 2020. Among 14 States reporting the total number of workers in affected meat and poultry processing facilities (112,616), COVID-19 was diagnosed in 9.1 percent of workers; the percentage of workers with COVID-19 ranged from 3.1 percent to 24.5 percent per facility.⁵

USDA OIG’s Office of Analytics and Innovation (OAI) conducted the pulse survey presented in this report to gain insight into FSIS inspectors’ perceptions of COVID-19 safety in their work environments. OAI coordinated the survey work with USDA OIG auditors who are conducting a related inspection;⁶ however, the survey was conducted independent of the inspection.

⁴ *Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers Interim Guidance from CDC and OSHA*, published April 26, 2020.

⁵ Waltenburg MA, Victoroff T, Rose CE, et al. Update: COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities—United States, April–May 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:887-892. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6927e2>.

⁶ The ongoing OIG inspection is related to actions FSIS took relating to COVID-19 to ensure the continuation of inspection operations at meat and poultry slaughter and processing establishments. The inspection also includes how FSIS utilized \$33 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding. As part of the inspection, OIG will be examining actions related to the health and safety of FSIS inspectors working at official establishments, continuity of operations, and sufficiency of resources to implement health and safety standards.

Pulse Survey Results

On February 22, 2021, OIG emailed an invitation to the online COVID-19 safety survey to all inspectors identified by FSIS. The survey, which included 52 questions,⁷ closed on March 5, 2021. Of the 7,065 employees invited to participate in the survey, 2,773 (39 percent) responded.

The survey questionnaire is in Appendix A. The response frequency tables for each survey question are in Appendix B.

Respondents' Demographics

The survey questionnaire led off with eight introductory questions to gather the respondents' basic demographic data. The respondents collectively reported they currently work in all 50 States, as well as the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Figure 3 presents a high-level summary of other respondent demographics.

⁷ The survey consisted of 23 numbered questions or statements, some with multiple parts. In total, there were 52 questions or statements for response, hereinafter referred to as "questions."

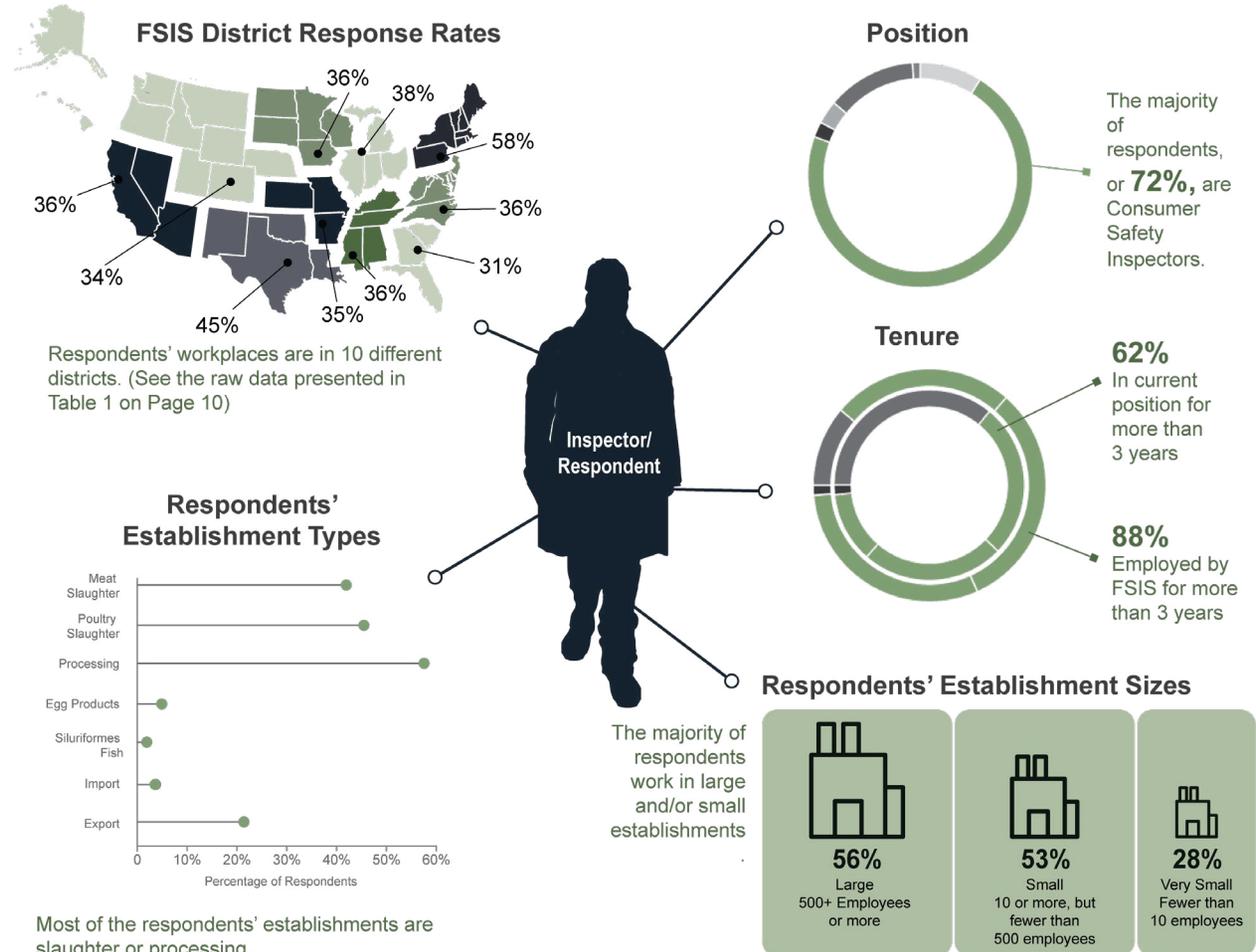


Figure 3. Highlights of Respondent Demographics

Survey Results, continued

FSIS Inspectors' Perceptions of COVID-19 Illness' Impact at Their Assigned Establishments

A round of six survey questions asked respondents about the impact of COVID-19 illness on their assigned establishments' operations. This round of questions provides a broader view of inspectors' experiences with COVID-19 illness in the workplace and their perceptions of its impact, as shown in Figure 4.

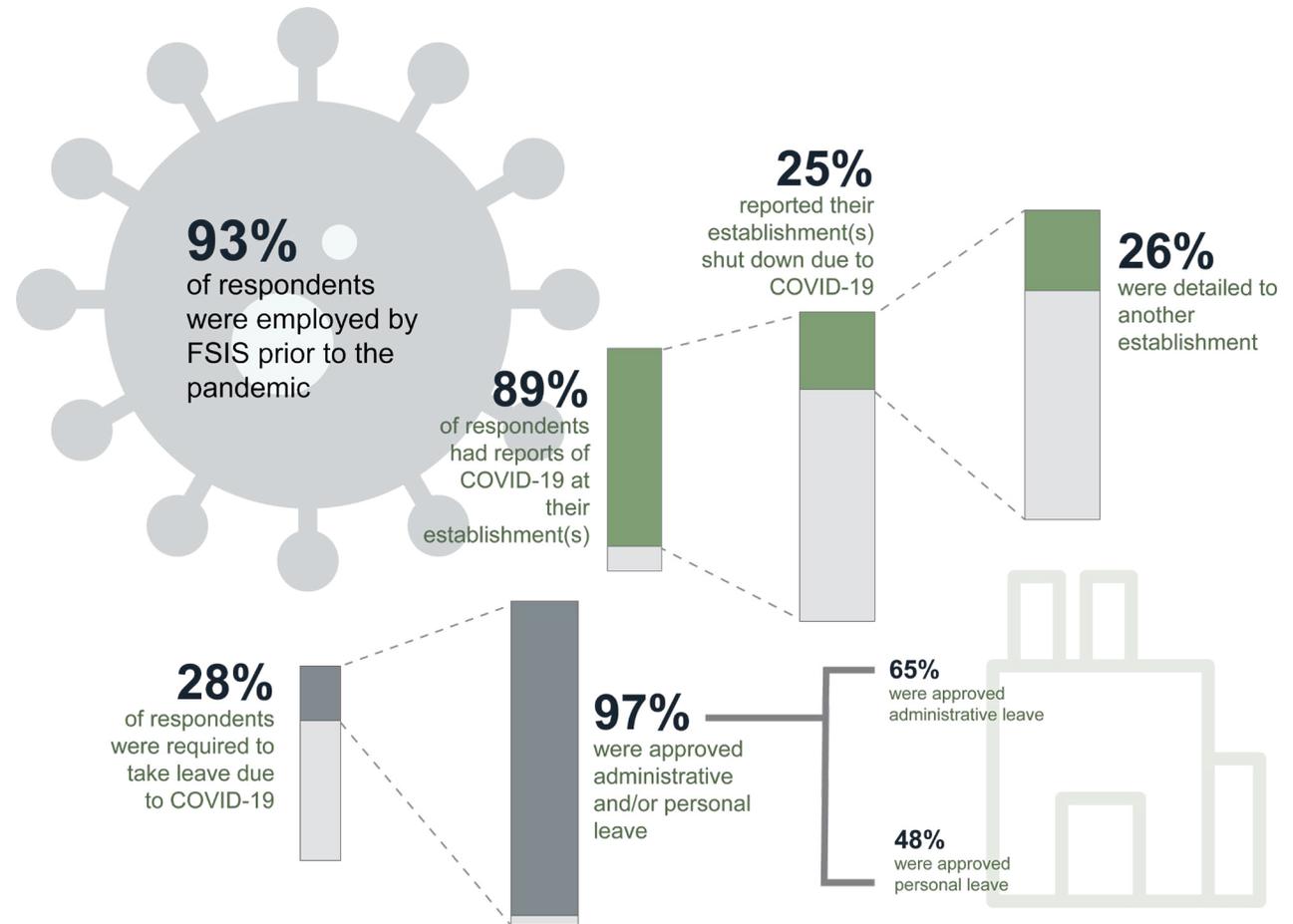
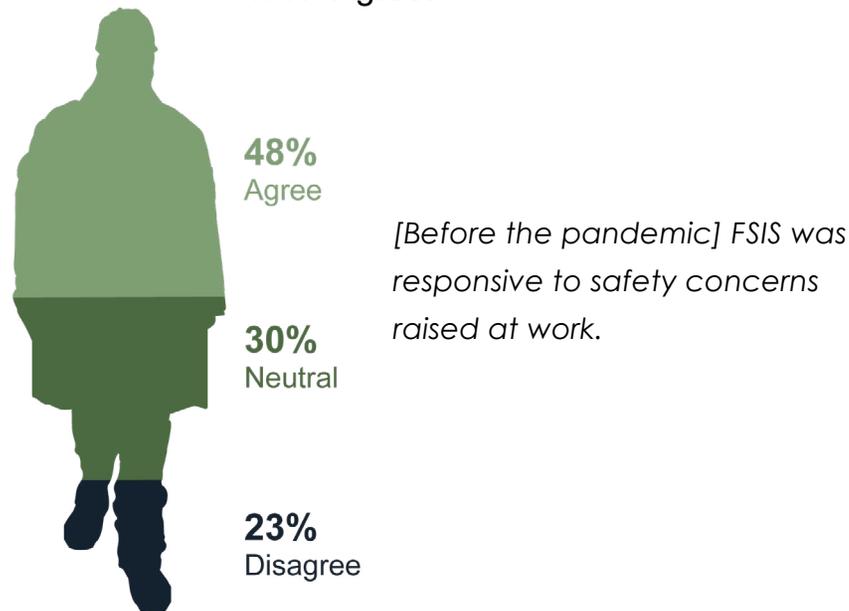


Figure 4. Impact of COVID-19 Illness at Inspectors' Establishments

Survey Results, continued

Responses to 8 of the 9 questions about working conditions and safety before the pandemic were greater than 50% in the positive (“Agree”); for the 9th question, shown in Figure 5, 48% “Agree.”



Note: Percentages do not total 100 percent, due to rounding.

Figure 5. Responses to “FSIS was responsive to safety concerns raised at work”

FSIS Inspectors’ Perceptions of Safety in the Work Environment Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

The third section of the survey included nine questions about working conditions and safety before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions in this section were a means to establish a baseline of inspectors’ perceptions of safety in their work environments.

The majority (greater than 50 percent) of responses to each question in this section were in the positive (“agree”), with the exception of responses for one question: Figure 5 shows 48 percent (less than the majority) of respondents reported they agree FSIS was responsive to safety concerns raised at work, prior to the pandemic.

Six of the questions in this section parallel questions in a later section of the survey relating to the inspectors’ *current* perceptions of safety in the work environment (at the time of the survey). See Figure 7 for a comparison of inspectors’ sentiments about workplace safety pre-pandemic and in the current environment.

Survey Results, continued

FSIS Inspectors' Perceptions of Safety in the Current Work Environment

The fourth section of the survey focused on inspectors' perceptions of safety in their current work environments. The 28 questions in this section were designed to record the *current* pulse of the inspectors' sentiments regarding

workplace safety in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority (greater than 50 percent) of responses to each question in this section were in the positive (generally, "agree"). Figure 6 shows three questions with high percentages of "agree" responses and three questions with high percentages of "disagree" responses.

Six of the questions in this section parallel those asked in an earlier section of the survey relating to the inspectors' perceptions of safety in the work environment *before* the COVID-19 pandemic. See Figure 7 for a comparison of inspectors' sentiments about workplace safety pre-pandemic and in the current environment.

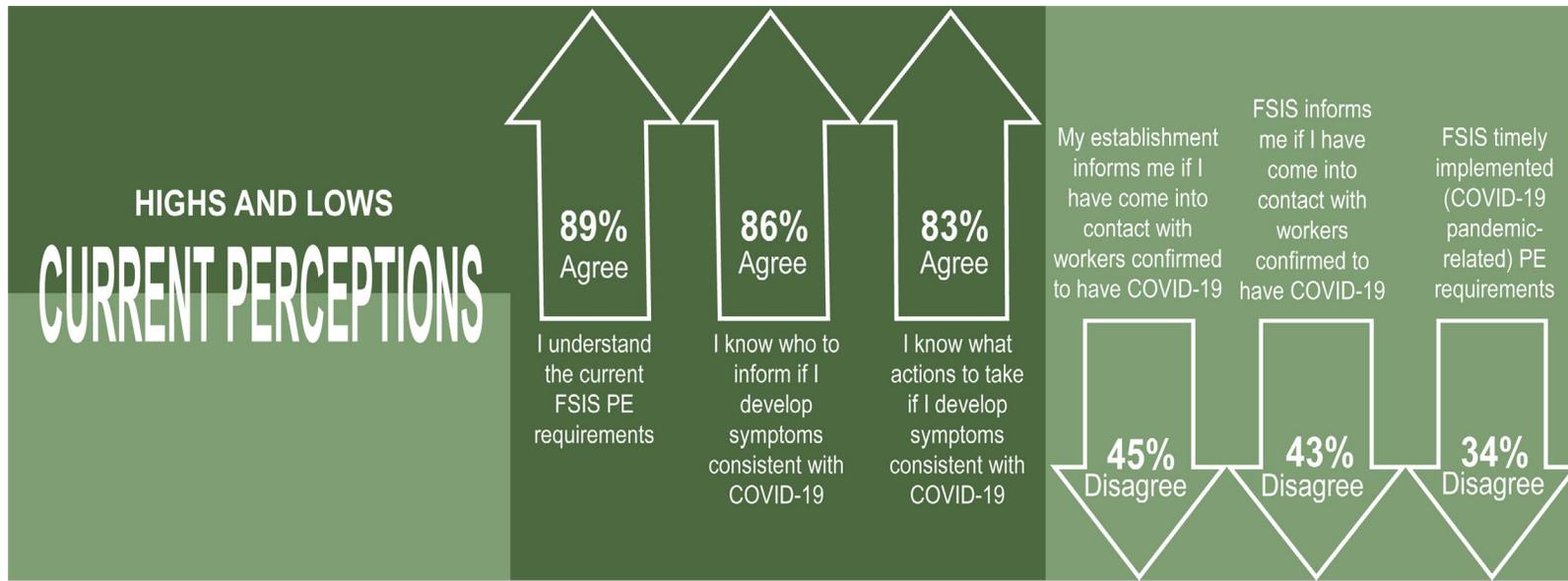


Figure 6. Current Perceptions—Questions with High Percentages of "Agree" and "Disagree"

Survey Results, continued

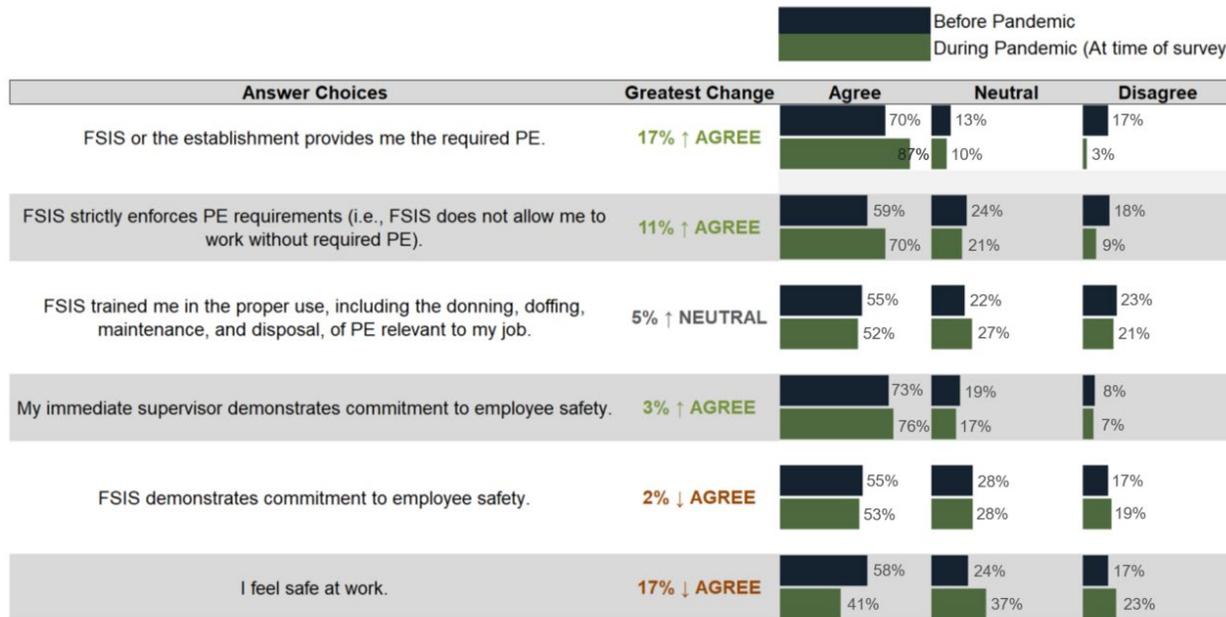
Comparing FSIS Inspectors' Perceptions of Safety in the Work Environment Before Pandemic Versus Current

Six questions relating to workplace safety were posed twice within the survey—first asking about inspectors' perceptions before the pandemic (about March 1, 2020), then asking about their current perceptions at the time

the survey was administered (about February 22, 2021). Each question was posed on a three-point Likert scale (ranging from “agree,” to “neutral,” to “disagree”).

Figure 7 shows the six questions with their corresponding “before” and “current” responses. For each question, the answer with the greatest change from “before” to “current” is called out

in the “Greatest Change” column. For three questions, the greatest change was an increase in the percentage of “agree” (positive) responses; for one question, the greatest change was an increase in the percentage of “neutral” responses; and for two questions, the greatest change was a decrease in the percentage of “agree” responses.



72% reported COVID-19 was the cause for those who do not currently feel safe

Figure 7. Comparison of Inspectors' Sentiments About Workplace Safety Pre-Pandemic and in the Current Environment

Survey Results, continued

FSIS Inspectors' Comments About FSIS' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

A final, open-ended survey question permitted a text response by survey respondents. This question gave respondents an opportunity to express any other thoughts or opinions not captured in the questions. There were 1,018 viable comments collected from this question, with an average word count of 85.⁸

Words and phrases frequently used in the comments were tabulated and used to create five groupings: equipment, environment, communication, benefits, and health/safety. Figure 8 shows key themes underlying each group, based on the inspectors' comments.

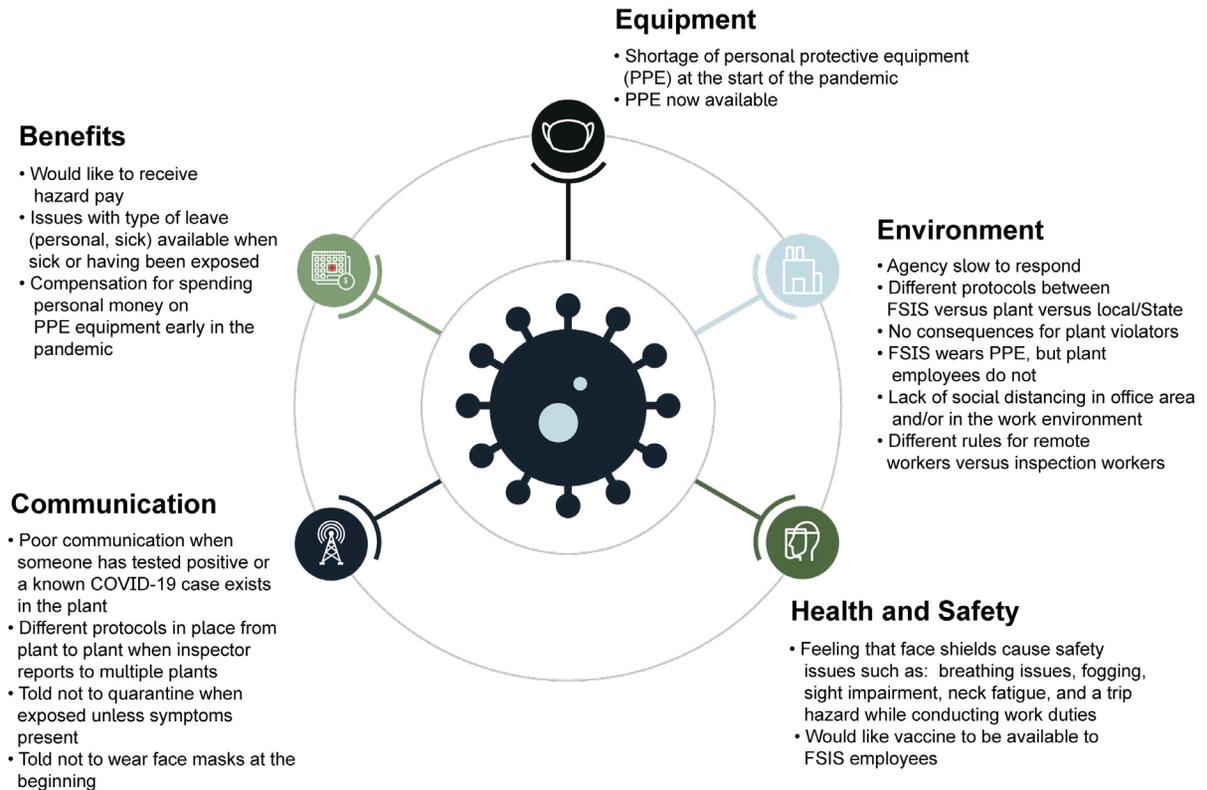


Figure 8. Key Themes Expressed by Inspectors in Responses to the Open-Ended Question, Grouped by Topic

⁸ There were 1,213 responses to this question. We did not include 195 responses such as “No comments,” “N/A,” and “no” because we considered them inconsequential.

Scope and Methodology

The intended recipients of this survey were all FSIS inspectors. FSIS provided OIG a list of FSIS inspection program personnel, their email addresses, and their FSIS districts. In addition, OIG obtained a list of FSIS-regulated establishments from FSIS’ website. The online survey began on February 22, 2021, when OIG emailed the invitation to all 7,065 inspectors identified by FSIS. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary, and responses were anonymous.

The survey questionnaire included 52 questions in 5 sections:

- Respondent demographics. (8 questions)
- Inspectors’ experiences with the impact of COVID-19 illness at their assigned establishments. (6 questions)
- Inspectors’ perceptions of workplace safety before the COVID-19 pandemic (defined as “about March 1, 2020”). (9 questions)
- Inspectors’ perceptions of current workplace safety (during the

pandemic, at the time of the survey). (28 questions)

- Inspectors’ comments about FSIS’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic. (1 question)

See the survey questionnaire in Appendix A.

The survey closed on March 5, 2021. Of the 7,065 employees invited to participate in the survey, 2,773 (39 percent) responded, including 1,213 who provided comments in response to the final, open-ended question. See Appendix B for the survey results.

Table 1 shows the numbers of inspectors, and the survey response rates, by FSIS district. The numbers of FSIS inspectors per district are based upon a list of each inspector’s district, provided by FSIS; the numbers of respondents per district are based upon the survey respondents’ answers to survey question 5, “In which district do you work?”⁹

Leveraging the list of FSIS-regulated establishments from FSIS’ website, OIG used geographic information system mapping software to produce the map of establishments shown in Figure 2.

FSIS District	Number of FSIS Inspectors	Number of Respondents	Response Rate
Alameda, California (District 05)	484	172	35.54%
Denver, Colorado (District 15)	776	267	34.41%
Des Moines, Iowa (District 25)	841	306	36.39%
Springdale, Arkansas (District 35)	737	260	35.28%
Dallas, Texas (District 40)	726	325	44.77%
Chicago, Illinois (District 50)	524	201	38.36%
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (District 60)	526	307	58.37%
Raleigh, North Carolina (District 80)	869	310	35.67%
Atlanta, Georgia (District 85)	731	226	30.92%
Jackson, Mississippi (District 90)	851	305	35.84%
Total	7,065	2,679	

Table 1. Numbers of Inspectors and Response Rates by District

⁹ Forty-three (43) respondents chose “Prefer not to answer,” and 51 skipped the question.

Scope and Methodology, continued

Survey Approach

Survey respondents who self-reported they were not currently employed as FSIS inspectors were immediately disqualified from taking the survey.¹⁰

The survey questionnaire itself contained skip logic, meaning respondents received only those questions relevant to them, based on their responses to earlier questions. For example, respondents did not receive questions concerning shutdown of their assigned establishment(s) due to a COVID-19 outbreak if they indicated in a previous question there had been no outbreak of COVID-19 at their assigned establishments.

Many questions were asked on a three-point Likert scale, in order to give respondents greater flexibility in responding.¹¹ To promote the response rate and preclude respondents choosing to end the survey rather than give

an answer, none of the questions required an answer; respondents were allowed to skip questions (i.e., linearly continue the survey without answering a question) by clicking “Next” on each page. Additionally, respondents were offered a “Prefer not to answer” option on questions that were not asked on a Likert scale.

Treatment of the Question Responses

With the exception of the responses to the open-ended final question, OIG presents in this report the responses to the survey without drawing any inferences or interpreting the results. In order to calculate the percentage of respondents who reported working in more than one type or size establishment, OIG leveraged individual survey responses: OIG totaled the numbers of inspectors who reported they work at more than one type and/or size of establishment and compared that to the number of inspectors

who answered one or both of the corresponding survey questions.¹² (The individual survey responses are not included in this report, in order to protect the anonymity of respondents.)

For the open-ended survey question, we performed a three-step content analysis on the responses to summarize key ideas. First, we identified and removed 195 comments such as “No comments,” “N/A,” and “no,” and variations on those themes; there remained 1,018 viable responses for review. In the second step, analysts tabulated words and phrases that were frequently used in the remaining 1,018 responses. This short list of frequently used words was leveraged to create five groupings: equipment, environment, communication, benefits, and health/safety. Analysts then reviewed responses related to the frequently used words, consolidated key themes that were expressed, and placed each theme into one of the five groupings.

¹⁰ Those who attempted to participate in the survey, but specifically indicated they were “Other” than a food inspector, consumer safety inspector, frontline supervisor, supervisory consumer safety inspector, or supervisory public health veterinarian were presented with a screen that thanked them for participating in the survey, and the survey was terminated.

¹¹ For example, respondents were asked about their level of agreement with the statement that “[before the COVID-19 pandemic] FSIS was responsive to safety concerns raised at work.” Respondents were presented with a scale of possible answers as follows: Agree, Neutral, Disagree.

¹² See Survey Questions 7 and 8.

Scope and Methodology, continued

Views expressed in response to the open-ended question may not be representative of all FSIS employees who participated in the survey. We did not assess the merits of the individual comments or suggestions provided in response to the open-ended survey question.

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire's "skip logic" is noted below, with tables labeled "SKIP LOGIC APPLIED." Similarly, the questionnaire includes tables that display the options that were presented to respondents on drop-down menus.

Because we inserted the explanatory tables into this questionnaire, its pagination differs from the actual online survey. The start of each online survey page is indicated by the appearance of the OIG logo in the upper left of the image.



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

Instructions: If you choose not to answer a question, the survey will advance to the next question.

1. What is your position at FSIS?

- Food Inspector
- Consumer Safety Inspector
- Frontline Supervisor
- Supervisory Consumer Safety Inspector
- Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

SKIP LOGIC APPLIED:	
If answer is...	Then skip to...
Food Inspector	Question 2
Consumer Safety Inspector	Question 2
Frontline Supervisor	Question 2
Supervisory Consumer Safety Inspector	Question 2
Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian	Question 2
Other	End of survey
Prefer not to answer	Question 2



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

2. What is your GS grade?

A drop-down menu offered the following answers.

Prefer not to answer
Other
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13

3. How long have you been in this position?

- 3 years or less
- More than 3 years to 10 years
- More than 10 years to 20 years
- More than 20 years
- Prefer not to answer

4. How long have you been employed by FSIS?

- 3 years or less
- More than 3 years to 10 years
- More than 10 years to 20 years
- More than 20 years
- Prefer not to answer



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

5. In which district do you work?

A drop-down menu offered the following answers.
Alameda, CA (District 05)
Denver, CO (District 75)
Des Moines, IA (District 25)
Springdale, AR (District 35)
Dallas, TX (District 40)
Chicago, IL (District 50)
Philadelphia, PA (District 60)
Raleigh, NC (District 80)
Atlanta, GA (District 85)
Jackson, MS (District 90)
Prefer not to answer

6. In what State or U.S. territory do you currently work?

A drop-down menu offered the following answers.

Prefer not to answer	Montana
Alabama	Nebraska
Alaska	Nevada
American Samoa	New Hampshire
Arizona	New Jersey
Arkansas	New Mexico
California	New York
Colorado	North Carolina
Connecticut	North Dakota
Delaware	Northern Marianas Islands
District of Columbia (DC)	Ohio
Florida	Oklahoma
Georgia	Oregon
Guam	Pennsylvania
Hawaii	Puerto Rico
Idaho	Rhode Island
Illinois	South Carolina
Indiana	South Dakota
Iowa	Tennessee
Kansas	Texas
Kentucky	Utah
Louisiana	Vermont
Maine	Virginia
Maryland	Virgin Islands
Massachusetts	Washington
Michigan	West Virginia
Minnesota	Wisconsin
Mississippi	Wyoming
Missouri	

7. At what type of establishment(s) do you work? (Select all that apply.)

- Meat slaughter
- Poultry slaughter
- Processing
- Egg products
- Siluriformes fish
- Import
- Export
- Prefer not to answer

8. What size is the establishment(s) in which you work? (Select all that apply.)

- Very small (Establishments with fewer than 10 employees)
- Small (Establishments with 10 or more employees but fewer than 500 employees)
- Large (Establishments with 500 or more employees)
- Prefer not to answer



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

9. Have there been reports of COVID-19 illness among establishment workers at any of your assigned establishments?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

SKIP LOGIC APPLIED:	
If answer is...	Then skip to...
Yes	Question 10
No	Question 12
Prefer not to answer	Question 10



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

10. Did the establishment(s) shut down due to COVID-19 illness or quarantine among establishment workers?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

SKIP LOGIC APPLIED:	
If answer is...	Then skip to...
Yes	Question 11
No	Question 12
Prefer not to answer	Question 11



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

11. When your assigned establishment(s) shut down because of COVID-19 illnesses or quarantine, were you detailed to another establishment?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

12. Were you ever required to take leave for health and safety issues related to COVID-19? (For example, a positive diagnosis for COVID-19, exposure to COVID-19 that required quarantine, reports of COVID-19 illness among establishment workers at your assigned establishment, etc.)

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

SKIP LOGIC APPLIED:	
If answer is...	Then skip to...
Yes	Question 13
No	Question 14
Prefer not to answer	Question 13



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

13. What type of leave was approved for your absence? (Select all that apply)

- Administrative leave (e.g., weather and safety, emergency paid sick leave)
- Personal leave (e.g., sick leave, annual leave, leave without pay, compensatory time off, etc.)
- Prefer not to answer



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

14. Were you employed by FSIS before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (about March 1, 2020)?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

SKIP LOGIC APPLIED:	
If answer is...	Then skip to...
Yes	Question 15
No	Question 17
Prefer not to answer	Question 15



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

15. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) available to you **BEFORE** the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
FSIS or the establishment provided me the required PE.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS or the establishment provided PE adequate to protect me in my work environment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS trained me in the proper use, including the donning, doffing, maintenance, and disposal, of PE relevant to my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS strictly enforced PE requirements (i.e., FSIS did not allow me to work without required PE).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS was responsive to safety concerns raised at work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

16. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) available to you **BEFORE** the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I could report safety concerns without fear of reprisal or repercussion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt safe at work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My immediate supervisor demonstrated commitment to employee safety.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS demonstrated commitment to employee safety.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

17. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) CURRENTLY available to you.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
My supervisor/FSIS ensures I am aware of risks associated with working during the COVID-19 pandemic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS timely implemented (COVID-19 pandemic-related) PE requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS provides notice of changes to PE requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My supervisor/FSIS explains changes to PE requirements to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My supervisor/FSIS explains how changes to PE requirements aid in preventing me from contracting a COVID-19 infection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My supervisor/FSIS explains how changes to PE requirements aid in preventing the spread of COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS trains in the proper use, including the donning, doffing, maintenance, and disposal, of current PE relevant to my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

18. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) **CURRENTLY** available to you.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I understand the current FSIS PE requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS' current PE requirements are reasonably sufficient to protect me from COVID-19 infection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS or the establishment provides me the required PE.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS reimburses me for my purchases of required PE.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS strictly enforces PE requirements (i.e., FSIS does not allow me to work without required PE).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS or the establishment provides PE of adequate quality to reduce my risk of infection from COVID-19 in my work environment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS or the establishment provides PE in sufficient quantities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

19. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) **CURRENTLY** available to you.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
FSIS informs me if I have come into contact with workers confirmed to have COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My establishment informs me if I have come into contact with workers confirmed to have COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS has informed me of the process for reporting a positive diagnosis for COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS or the establishment conducts on site symptom assessment of inspectors at my establishment (for example temperature screening or orally asks health-screening questions concerning COVID-19).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know who to inform if I develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know what actions to take if I develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can report pandemic-related safety concerns without fear of reprisal or repercussion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

20. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) **CURRENTLY** available to you.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
FSIS is responsive to pandemic-related safety concerns raised at work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My immediate supervisor demonstrates commitment to employee safety.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS demonstrates commitment to employee safety.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
COVID-19 testing is available to me at no cost if I am exposed at work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FSIS encourages me to seek guidance from my medical provider regarding testing for COVID-19 if I suspect I have been exposed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. I feel safe at work.

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

SKIP LOGIC APPLIED:

If answer is...	Then skip to...
Agree	Question 23
Neutral	Question 23
Disagree	Question 22



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

22. I do not feel safe at work, but COVID-19 is not the cause.

Agree

Neutral

Disagree



OIG Pulse Survey of FSIS Inspectors

23. If there is anything additional you would like to share concerning FSIS' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, please enter comments below.

Appendix B: Response Frequency Tables for Each Survey Question

The following tables show the respondents' chosen answers, and numbers and percentages of responses, for each of the survey questions. Percentages are rounded to two decimal places and may not sum to the total shown.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, the free-text responses to the final, open-ended question are not included in this report.

Q1. What is your position at FSIS?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Food Inspector	247	8.88%
Consumer Safety Inspector	1,989	71.55%
Frontline Supervisor	60	2.16%
Supervisory Consumer Safety Inspector	95	3.42%
Supervisory Public Health Veterinarian	349	12.55%
Other	10	0.36%
Prefer not to answer	30	1.08%
Total Answered	2,780	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	<i>2,780</i>	<i>99.89%</i>
<i>Skipped</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0.11%</i>
Total Surveyed	2,783	100.00%

NOTE: 10 respondents were filtered out of the remaining survey questions because the respondents indicated they held positions “Other” than the targeted inspector positions.

Q2. What is your GS grade?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Prefer not to answer	27	1.02%
Other	6	0.23%
5	53	2.00%
6	0	0.00%
7	205	7.74%
8	162	6.11%
9	1,592	60.08%
10	195	7.36%
11	11	0.42%
12	335	12.64%
13	64	2.42%
Total Answered	2,650	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	<i>2,650</i>	<i>95.56%</i>
<i>Skipped</i>	<i>123</i>	<i>4.44%</i>
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q3. How long have you been in this position?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
3 years or less	991	36.00%
More than 3 years to 10 years	727	26.41%
More than 10 years to 20 years	661	24.01%
More than 20 years	330	11.99%
Prefer not to answer	44	1.60%
Total Answered	2,753	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	2,753	99.28%
<i>Skipped</i>	20	0.72%
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q4. How long have you been employed by FSIS?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
3 years or less	312	11.32%
More than 3 years to 10 years	698	25.32%
More than 10 years to 20 years	878	31.85%
More than 20 years	837	30.36%
Prefer not to answer	32	1.16%
Total Answered	2,757	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	2,757	99.42%
<i>Skipped</i>	16	0.58%
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q5. In which district do you work?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Alameda, California (District 05)	172	6.32%
Denver, Colorado (District 15)	267	9.81%
Des Moines, Iowa (District 25)	306	11.24%
Springdale, Arkansas (District 35)	260	9.55%
Dallas, Texas (District 40)	325	11.94%
Chicago, Illinois (District 50)	201	7.38%
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (District 60)	307	11.28%
Raleigh, North Carolina (District 80)	310	11.39%
Atlanta, Georgia (District 85)	226	8.30%
Jackson, Mississippi (District 90)	305	11.20%
Prefer not to answer	43	1.58%
Total Answered	2,722	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	2,722	98.16%
<i>Skipped</i>	51	1.84%
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q6. In what State or U.S. territory do you currently work?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Prefer not to answer	66	2.44%
Alabama	95	3.51%
Alaska	6	0.22%
American Samoa	0	0.00%
Arizona	10	0.37%
Arkansas	118	4.36%
California	158	5.84%
Colorado	40	1.48%
Connecticut	12	0.44%
Delaware	41	1.52%
District of Columbia (DC)	2	0.07%
Florida	54	2.00%
Georgia	129	4.77%
Guam	1	0.04%
Hawaii	14	0.52%
Idaho	17	0.63%
Illinois	57	2.11%
Indiana	50	1.85%
Iowa	90	3.33%
Kansas	45	1.66%
Kentucky	63	2.33%
Louisiana	43	1.59%
Maine	9	0.33%
Maryland	28	1.03%
Massachusetts	21	0.78%
Michigan	39	1.44%
Minnesota	77	2.85%
Mississippi	85	3.14%
Missouri	94	3.47%
Montana	6	0.22%
Nebraska	90	3.33%

Q6, continued. In what State or U.S. territory do you currently work?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Nevada	4	0.15%
New Hampshire	6	0.22%
New Jersey	55	2.03%
New Mexico	7	0.26%
New York	86	3.18%
North Carolina	110	4.07%
North Dakota	9	0.33%
Northern Marianas Islands	0	0.00%
Ohio	53	1.96%
Oklahoma	38	1.40%
Oregon	21	0.78%
Pennsylvania	154	5.69%
Puerto Rico	11	0.41%
Rhode Island	4	0.15%
South Carolina	31	1.15%
South Dakota	38	1.40%
Tennessee	56	2.07%
Texas	233	8.61%
Utah	16	0.59%
Vermont	7	0.26%
Virginia	56	2.07%
Virgin Islands	1	0.04%
Washington	48	1.77%
West Virginia	13	0.48%
Wisconsin	86	3.18%
Wyoming	3	0.11%
Total Answered	2,706	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	<i>2,706</i>	<i>97.58%</i>
<i>Skipped</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>2.42%</i>
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q7. At what type of establishment(s) do you work? (Select all that apply.)

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Prefer not to answer	54	1.96%
Meat slaughter	1,177	42.82%
Poultry slaughter	1,277	46.45%
Processing	1,604	58.35%
Egg products	166	6.04%
Siluriformes fish	86	3.13%
Import	123	4.47%
Export	620	22.55%
Total Answered	5,107	185.78%
<i>Answered</i>	<i>2,749</i>	<i>99.13%</i>
<i>Skipped</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>0.87%</i>
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

NOTE: Total answered exceeds 100 percent because some respondents selected more than one answer.

Q8. What size is the establishment(s) in which you work? (Select all that apply.)

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Prefer not to answer	80	2.92%
Very small (Establishments with fewer than 10 employees)	760	27.70%
Small (Establishments with 10 or more employees but fewer than 500 employees)	1,447	52.73%
Large (Establishments with 500 or more employees)	1,530	55.76%
Total Answered	3,817	139.10%
<i>Answered</i>	<i>2,744</i>	<i>98.95%</i>
<i>Skipped</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>1.05%</i>
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

NOTE: Total answered exceeds 100 percent because some respondents selected more than one answer.

Q9. Have there been reports of COVID-19 illness among establishment workers at any of your assigned establishments?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Yes	2,449	89.22%
No	221	8.05%
Prefer not to answer	75	2.73%
Total Answered	2,745	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	2,745	98.99%
<i>Skipped</i>	28	1.01%
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q10. Did the establishment(s) shut down due to COVID-19 illness or quarantine among establishment workers?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Yes	620	25.31%
No	1,764	72.00%
Prefer not to answer	66	2.69%
Total Answered	2,450	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	2,450	88.35%
<i>Skipped</i>	323	11.65%
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q11. When your assigned establishment(s) shut down because of COVID-19 illnesses or quarantine, were you detailed to another establishment?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Yes	169	26.45%
No	430	67.29%
Prefer not to answer	40	6.26%
Total Answered	639	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	639	23.04%
<i>Skipped</i>	2,134	76.96%
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q12. Were you ever required to take leave for health and safety issues related to COVID-19? (For example, a positive diagnosis for COVID-19, exposure to COVID-19 that required quarantine, reports of COVID-19 illness among establishment workers at your assigned establishment, etc.)

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Yes	776	28.39%
No	1,870	68.42%
Prefer not to answer	87	3.18%
Total Answered	2,733	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	<i>2,733</i>	<i>98.56%</i>
<i>Skipped</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>1.44%</i>
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q13. What type of leave was approved for your absence? (Select all that apply.)

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Prefer not to answer	26	3.34%
Administrative leave (e.g., weather and safety, emergency paid sick leave)	504	64.78%
Personal leave (e.g., sick leave, annual leave, leave without pay, compensatory time off, etc.)	370	47.56%
Total Answered	900	115.68%
<i>Answered</i>	<i>778</i>	<i>28.06%</i>
<i>Skipped</i>	<i>1,995</i>	<i>71.94%</i>
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

NOTE: Total answered exceeds 100 percent because some respondents selected more than one answer.

Q14. Were you employed by FSIS before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (about March 1, 2020)?

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
Yes	2,538	93.07%
No	162	5.94%
Prefer not to answer	27	0.99%
Total Answered	2,727	100.00%
<i>Answered</i>	<i>2,727</i>	<i>98.34%</i>
<i>Skipped</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>1.66%</i>
Total Surveyed	2,773	100.00%

Q15. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) available to you BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic.

Answer Choices	Agree Responses (Number)	Agree Responses (Percent)	Neutral Responses (Number)	Neutral Responses (Percent)	Disagree Responses (Number)	Disagree Responses (Percent)	Total Answered (Number)	Total Answered (Percent)	Answered (Number)	Answered (Percent)	Skipped (Number)	Skipped (Percent)	Total Surveyed (Number)	Total Surveyed (Percent)
FSIS or the establishment provided me the required PE.	1,769	70.34%	320	12.72%	426	16.94%	2,515	100.00%	2,515	90.70%	258	9.30%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS or the establishment provided PE adequate to protect me in my work environment.	1,666	66.32%	400	15.92%	446	17.75%	2,512	100.00%	2,512	90.59%	261	9.41%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS trained me in the proper use, including the donning, doffing, maintenance, and disposal, of PE relevant to my job.	1,386	55.13%	557	22.16%	571	22.71%	2,514	100.00%	2,514	90.66%	259	9.34%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS strictly enforced PE requirements (i.e., FSIS did not allow me to work without required PE).	1,472	58.60%	593	23.61%	447	17.79%	2,512	100.00%	2,512	90.59%	261	9.41%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS was responsive to safety concerns raised at work.	1,197	47.65%	745	29.66%	570	22.69%	2,512	100.00%	2,512	90.59%	261	9.41%	2,773	100.00%

Q16. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) available to you BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic.

Answer Choices	Agree Responses (Number)	Agree Responses (Percent)	Neutral Responses (Number)	Neutral Responses (Percent)	Disagree Responses (Number)	Disagree Responses (Percent)	Total Answered (Number)	Total Answered (Percent)	Answered (Number)	Answered (Percent)	Skipped (Number)	Skipped (Percent)	Total Surveyed (Number)	Total Surveyed (Percent)
I could report safety concerns without fear of reprisal or repercussion.	1,852	73.76%	456	18.16%	203	8.08%	2,511	100.00%	2,511	90.55%	262	9.45%	2,773	100.00%
I felt safe at work.	1,442	58.45%	601	24.36%	424	17.19%	2,467	100.00%	2,467	88.97%	306	11.03%	2,773	100.00%
My immediate supervisor demonstrated commitment to employee safety.	1,826	72.89%	479	19.12%	200	7.98%	2,505	100.00%	2,505	90.34%	268	9.66%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS demonstrated commitment to employee safety.	1,385	55.29%	691	27.58%	429	17.13%	2,505	100.00%	2,505	90.34%	268	9.66%	2,773	100.00%

Q17. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) CURRENTLY available to you.

Answer Choices	Agree Responses (Number)	Agree Responses (Percent)	Neutral Responses (Number)	Neutral Responses (Percent)	Disagree Responses (Number)	Disagree Responses (Percent)	Total Answered (Number)	Total Answered (Percent)	Answered (Number)	Answered (Percent)	Skipped (Number)	Skipped (Percent)	Total Surveyed (Number)	Total Surveyed (Percent)
My supervisor/FSIS ensures I am aware of risks associated with working during the COVID-19 pandemic.	1,934	72.00%	489	18.21%	263	9.79%	2,686	100.00%	2,686	96.86%	87	3.14%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS timely implemented (COVID-19 pandemic-related) PE requirements.	1,162	43.25%	623	23.19%	902	33.57%	2,687	100.00%	2,687	96.90%	86	3.10%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS provides me notice of changes to PE requirements.	1,911	71.44%	578	21.61%	186	6.95%	2,675	100.00%	2,675	96.47%	98	3.53%	2,773	100.00%
My supervisor/FSIS explains changes to PE requirements to me.	1,885	70.52%	543	20.31%	245	9.17%	2,673	100.00%	2,673	96.39%	100	3.61%	2,773	100.00%
My supervisor/FSIS explains how changes to PE requirements aid in preventing me from contracting a COVID-19 infection.	1,621	60.53%	671	25.06%	386	14.41%	2,678	100.00%	2,678	96.57%	95	3.43%	2,773	100.00%
My supervisor/FSIS explains how changes to PE requirements aid in preventing the spread of COVID-19.	1,635	61.03%	673	25.12%	371	13.85%	2,679	100.00%	2,679	96.61%	94	3.39%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS trains me in the proper use, including the donning, doffing, maintenance, and disposal, of current PE relevant to my job.	1,393	52.04%	732	27.34%	552	20.62%	2,677	100.00%	2,677	96.54%	96	3.46%	2,773	100.00%

Q18. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) CURRENTLY available to you.

Answer Choices	Agree Responses (Number)	Agree Responses (Percent)	Neutral Responses (Number)	Neutral Responses (Percent)	Disagree Responses (Number)	Disagree Responses (Percent)	Total Answered (Number)	Total Answered (Percent)	Answered (Number)	Answered (Percent)	Skipped (Number)	Skipped (Percent)	Total Surveyed (Number)	Total Surveyed (Percent)
I understand the current FSIS PE requirements.	2,380	89.24%	217	8.14%	70	2.62%	2,667	100.00%	2,667	96.18%	106	3.82%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS' current PE requirements are reasonably sufficient to protect me from COVID-19 infection.	1,571	58.82%	705	26.39%	395	14.79%	2,671	100.00%	2,671	96.32%	102	3.68%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS or the establishment provides me the required PE.	2,321	86.93%	276	10.34%	73	2.73%	2,670	100.00%	2,670	96.29%	103	3.71%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS reimburses me for my purchases of required PE.	887	33.51%	1,282	48.43%	478	18.06%	2,647	100.00%	2,647	95.46%	126	4.54%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS strictly enforces PE requirements (i.e., FSIS does not allow me to work without required PE).	1,874	70.32%	553	20.75%	238	8.93%	2,665	100.00%	2,665	96.11%	108	3.89%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS or the establishment provides PE of adequate quality to reduce my risk of infection from COVID-19 in my work environment.	1,785	66.85%	579	21.69%	306	11.46%	2,670	100.00%	2,670	96.29%	103	3.71%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS or the establishment provides PE in sufficient quantities.	2,027	75.92%	475	17.79%	168	6.29%	2,670	100.00%	2,670	96.29%	103	3.71%	2,773	100.00%

Q19. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) CURRENTLY available to you.

Answer Choices	Agree Responses (Number)	Agree Responses (Percent)	Neutral Responses (Number)	Neutral Responses (Percent)	Disagree Responses (Number)	Disagree Responses (Percent)	Total Answered (Number)	Total Answered (Percent)	Answered (Number)	Answered (Percent)	Skipped (Number)	Skipped (Percent)	Total Surveyed (Number)	Total Surveyed (Percent)
FSIS informs me if I have come into contact with workers confirmed to have COVID-19.	778	29.34%	721	27.19%	1,153	43.48%	2,652	100.00%	2,652	95.64%	121	4.36%	2,773	100.00%
My establishment informs me if I have come into contact with workers confirmed to have COVID-19.	856	32.35%	599	22.64%	1,191	45.01%	2,646	100.00%	2,646	95.42%	127	4.58%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS has informed me of the process for reporting a positive diagnosis for COVID-19.	1,446	54.61%	595	22.47%	607	22.92%	2,648	100.00%	2,648	95.49%	125	4.51%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS or the establishment conducts on site symptom assessment of inspectors at my establishment (for example temperature screening or orally asks health-screening questions concerning COVID-19).	1,731	65.37%	433	16.35%	484	18.28%	2,648	100.00%	2,648	95.49%	125	4.51%	2,773	100.00%
I know who to inform if I develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19.	2,279	85.87%	252	9.50%	123	4.63%	2,654	100.00%	2,654	95.71%	119	4.29%	2,773	100.00%
I know what actions to take if I develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19.	2,203	83.29%	275	10.40%	167	6.31%	2,645	100.00%	2,645	95.38%	128	4.62%	2,773	100.00%
I can report pandemic-related safety concerns without fear of reprisal or repercussion.	1,847	69.67%	548	20.67%	256	9.66%	2,651	100.00%	2,651	95.60%	122	4.40%	2,773	100.00%

Q20. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements regarding working conditions and the protective equipment (PE) CURRENTLY available to you.

Answer Choices	Agree Responses (Number)	Agree Responses (Percent)	Neutral Responses (Number)	Neutral Responses (Percent)	Disagree Responses (Number)	Disagree Responses (Percent)	Total Answered (Number)	Total Answered (Percent)	Answered (Number)	Answered (Percent)	Skipped (Number)	Skipped (Percent)	Total Surveyed (Number)	Total Surveyed (Percent)
FSIS is responsive to pandemic-related safety concerns raised at work.	1,230	46.47%	852	32.19%	565	21.34%	2,647	100.00%	2,647	95.46%	126	4.54%	2,773	100.00%
My immediate supervisor demonstrates commitment to employee safety.	2,016	76.10%	442	16.69%	191	7.21%	2,649	100.00%	2,649	95.53%	124	4.47%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS demonstrates commitment to employee safety.	1,407	53.26%	732	27.71%	503	19.04%	2,642	100.00%	2,642	95.28%	131	4.72%	2,773	100.00%
COVID-19 testing is available to me at no cost if I am exposed at work.	877	33.37%	1,036	39.42%	715	27.21%	2,628	100.00%	2,628	94.77%	145	5.23%	2,773	100.00%
FSIS encourages me to seek guidance from my medical provider regarding testing for COVID-19 if I suspect I have been exposed.	1,517	57.51%	741	28.09%	380	14.40%	2,638	100.00%	2,638	95.13%	135	4.87%	2,773	100.00%

Q21. I feel safe at work.

Answer Choices	Agree Responses (Number)	Agree Responses (Percent)	Neutral Responses (Number)	Neutral Responses (Percent)	Disagree Responses (Number)	Disagree Responses (Percent)	Total Answered (Number)	Total Answered (Percent)	Answered (Number)	Answered (Percent)	Skipped (Number)	Skipped (Percent)	Total Surveyed (Number)	Total Surveyed (Percent)
I feel safe at work.	1,015	40.75%	915	36.73%	561	22.52%	2,491	100.00%	2,491	89.83%	282	10.17%	2,773	100.00%

Q22. I do not feel safe at work, but COVID-19 is not the cause.

Answer Choices	Agree Responses (Number)	Agree Responses (Percent)	Neutral Responses (Number)	Neutral Responses (Percent)	Disagree Responses (Number)	Disagree Responses (Percent)	Total Answered (Number)	Total Answered (Percent)	Answered (Number)	Answered (Percent)	Skipped (Number)	Skipped (Percent)	Total Surveyed (Number)	Total Surveyed (Percent)
I do not feel safe at work, but COVID-19 is not the cause.	56	7.61%	148	20.11%	532	72.28%	736	100.00%	736	26.54%	2,037	73.46%	2,773	100.00%

Q23. If there is anything additional you would like to share concerning FSIS' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, please enter comments below.

Answer Choices	Responses (Number)	Responses (Percent)
<i>Answered</i>	1,213	43.74%
<i>Skipped</i>	1,560	56.26%
<i>Total Surveyed</i>	2,773	100.00%

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service
OAI	Office of Analytics and Innovation
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
PE	protective equipment
PPE	personal protective equipment
U.S.	United States
USDA.....	U.S. Department of Agriculture

Agency Response



United States Department of Agriculture

Food Safety and
Inspection Service

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TO: Phyllis K. Fong
Inspector General
USDA Office of Inspector General

FROM: Paul Kiecker / s / 5 / 2 6 / 2 0 2 1
Administrator
USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

SUBJECT: Response to OIG Draft Report entitled, "Survey of Food Safety and Inspection Service Inspectors' Perceptions of COVID-19 Safety in the Work Environment" (OAI Product 21-001-01)

Thank you for providing the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) an opportunity to respond to the USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG), Office of Analytics and Innovation, draft report entitled, "Survey of Food Safety and Inspection Service Inspectors' Perceptions of COVID-19 Safety in the Work Environment."

FSIS is committed to protecting the health and safety of its employees, while ensuring that our Nation's food supply remains safe. During the COVID-19 pandemic, FSIS proactively worked to protect its employees and ensure that they are empowered and equipped to perform their duties as safely as possible.

Eighty-five percent of FSIS employees work in the field and are involved in inspecting food products at over 6,500 regulated facilities. As an Agency, we were challenged to adapt to rapidly changing conditions and evolving guidance from public health partners and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), while simultaneously implementing shifting best practices. These types of dynamic working conditions make it difficult to capture accurate perceptions in a survey that can be completed in a reasonable amount of time. Therefore, FSIS has the following comments with respect to key themes highlighted by the OIG that emerged from the survey results to provide more context:

Protective Equipment:

FSIS expeditiously developed, implemented, and communicated COVID-19 protective equipment (PE) requirements to inspection program personnel (IPP) as soon as Federal guidance was issued. From the outset of the pandemic, FSIS communicated Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance to IPP and issued internal guidance to protect inspectors' health and safety aligned with Federal guidelines and best practices recommended by the CDC, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and OPM to mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19.

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- Masks: The CDC reported the first case of COVID-19 in the United States on January 21, 2020 and the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. Through April 2, 2020, the CDC recommended people do not wear a mask unless sick or caring for someone who was sick and unable to wear a mask. However, on March 26, 2020, FSIS communicated to all employees they could voluntarily wear masks.

On April 3, 2020, the CDC revised its position and recommended the use of cloth face coverings and masks. FSIS promptly communicated to all employees that they should follow the updated guidance while the FSIS procurement process proceeded. To support employees in their ability to follow CDC guidelines when masks were not yet made available through the Agency due to global supply shortages, FSIS authorized a reimbursement of up to \$50 for employees to purchase or make their own face coverings. The Agency also authorized purchase card holders to buy hand sanitizer and disinfectants for IPP locally.

Due to high demand globally, even acquiring cloth face coverings and disposable masks in quantities sufficient to cover all IPP was challenging. FSIS reached out to approximately 55 vendors to procure masks.

On April 26, 2020, CDC again updated its guidance and jointly released with OSHA the *Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers Interim Guidance* for COVID-19. On May 1, 2020, the Agency started distributing cloth face coverings and disposable masks to IPP. Additionally, FSIS told industry that if they had supplies of face coverings or other PE and were requiring their employees to wear them, then they were expected to provide coverings/masks to FSIS inspectors in their establishments.

- Face Shields: Based on the April 26, 2020, CDC/OSHA recommendations, FSIS immediately began procuring face shields for IPP and requiring them to wear the shields in conjunction with masks as soon as they were available. On May 7, 2020, FSIS began to ship out our initial stock of face shields to IPP on slaughter assignments who were prioritized because in some instances, they had challenges fully socially distancing. By mid-June, FSIS was able to procure sufficient face shields for all IPP. FSIS' supervisors checked with every IPP to ensure that they both had face masks and face shields and that they understood that they were required to wear both.
- Hand Sanitizer: At the beginning of the pandemic hand sanitizer was in short supply. FSIS immediately authorized local purchases by purchase card holders and then quickly procured large shipments of hand sanitizer, which was available to IPP on May 5, 2020.

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Environment and Statutory Mandate:

As noted, FSIS was operating in a rapidly changing and evolving environment, requiring the Agency to effectively shift direction as Federal guidance changed and regulated industry implemented significant changes to its business practices in response to COVID-19. FSIS effectively navigated these challenges while operating within its existing authorities.

- The Federal Meat Inspection Act, Poultry Products Inspection Act and Egg Products Inspection Act provide FSIS with the authority to conduct inspections at Federally regulated establishments across the United States. The majority of FSIS employees work in the field and provide these essential inspection services at regulated establishments to ensure the safety of regulated product and, therefore, are not eligible to telework. **FSIS IPP inspect each and every livestock and poultry carcass before it can enter commerce, and Agency inspectors inspect every processing plant at least once per shift.** FSIS proactively explored all administrative means and flexibilities to protect its employees and ensure that they were, and continue to be, equipped to perform their duties as safely as possible. By mid-June, FSIS employees had access to protective equipment, including face coverings, face shields, and hand sanitizer. FSIS required the use of cloth face coverings or disposable face masks in conjunction with face shields by IPP to ensure FSIS could continue to meet its statutory mission while properly protecting themselves and others.

Health and Safety:

- FSIS relies on its Federal (CDC and OSHA), state, and local public health partners for best practices to control human transmitted illnesses. In situations in states and specific areas within states were rapidly changing, FSIS also instructed IPP to follow state and local health department protocols. Additionally, FSIS instructed IPP to comply with establishment pandemic protocols because these measures are often informed by the appropriate state and
- FSIS allowed employees identified as high-risk by the CDC to take paid administrative leave based on their self-certification until FSIS could adequately mitigate the hazards with proper PE. Approximately 740 IPP utilized this flexibility.

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Benefits:

- On March 23, 2020, FSIS issued guidance to managers and supervisors on leave/telework options available to employees who needed to be absent from work due to COVID-19 illness, quarantine, and/or caregiving responsibilities. This guidance aligned with COVID-19 Human Resources flexibilities set forth in OPM and USDA policy. FSIS allowed employees who fell within higher-risk categories defined by CDC to self-certify with their supervisor, excusing them from inspection duties by taking paid administrative leave. As noted above, approximately 740 IPP took advantage of this flexibility. After FSIS started equipping employees with face shields and masks in May 2020, self-certifying employees were given the option of returning to work, requesting paid or unpaid leave, or requesting a Reasonable Accommodation. A return-to-work decision tree was provided to supervisors as an aid in conducting risk assessments for CDC-defined high-risk employees.

Communication:

- Policy Changes: FSIS adapted and effectively communicated updated guidance and requirements to IPP through several channels, including weekly All Employee Town Halls, FSIS All-User emails, and FSIS Notices. Supervisors were charged with enforcing the requirements.
- Employee Communication: FSIS consistently held routine Town Halls with all employees and calls with district and regional managers. The calls afforded Senior leadership opportunities to directly engage with employees, particularly those in the field, offer a platform for listening, and share the most current information and guidance from USDA and other Federal agencies (e.g., CDC, OSHA). Since March 2020, FSIS conducted 83 Employee Town Halls (weekly town halls were held at multiple times during the day to provide opportunities for employees working different shifts the opportunity to participate) and responded to over 1,170 COVID-19 email inquiries submitted through our FSIS Feedback mailbox, reflecting FSIS' commitment to ensuring employees are kept informed of relevant guidance and policies. This communication has been critical as an avenue for immediate information release to the employee population.

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- **Industry Communication:** FSIS began a series of regular industry calls to provide updates on COVID-19 specific protocols. Even though FSIS does not have regulatory authority over the industry employees, I industry to follow current CDC and OSHA guidance including the *Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers Interim Guidance*, recommended controls for reducing the risk of COVID-19 which many establishments have implemented. OSHA has authority to ensure safe and healthful working conditions for establishment workers by setting and enforcing relevant safety standards, requirements, and protocols. FSIS also emphasized the need for establishments to immediately communicate information regarding COVID-19 positives to FSIS and encourage establishment employees to wear PE and provide it to FSIS inspection staff if the measures were part of the COVID-19 mitigation plan for their own employees. I continue to implement protocols to comply with OSHA and CDC guidance, including screening procedures, barriers in work and office areas, and social distancing to the extent feasible. FSIS personnel also participate in establishment screening practices as was clearly communicated from the beginning.
- **Public Health Advice and Communication:** A major organizational challenge during a pandemic is balancing an employee's privacy concerns with the need to alert other employees to potential exposures in the workplace. To strike an appropriate balance, FSIS followed CDC guidance for contact tracing and related communications. In addition to describing criteria for classifying persons as close contacts to a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19, this guidance also outlines advice for close contacts regarding quarantine and testing. It is important to note that FSIS employees would not necessarily be informed about infected individuals at their worksite if a contact tracing investigation did not determine these employees to be close contacts. FSIS regulatory authority does not extend to requiring establishments to inform FSIS when establishment workers are confirmed to have COVID-19 as safety issues are under OSHA and subject to tl Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA.)

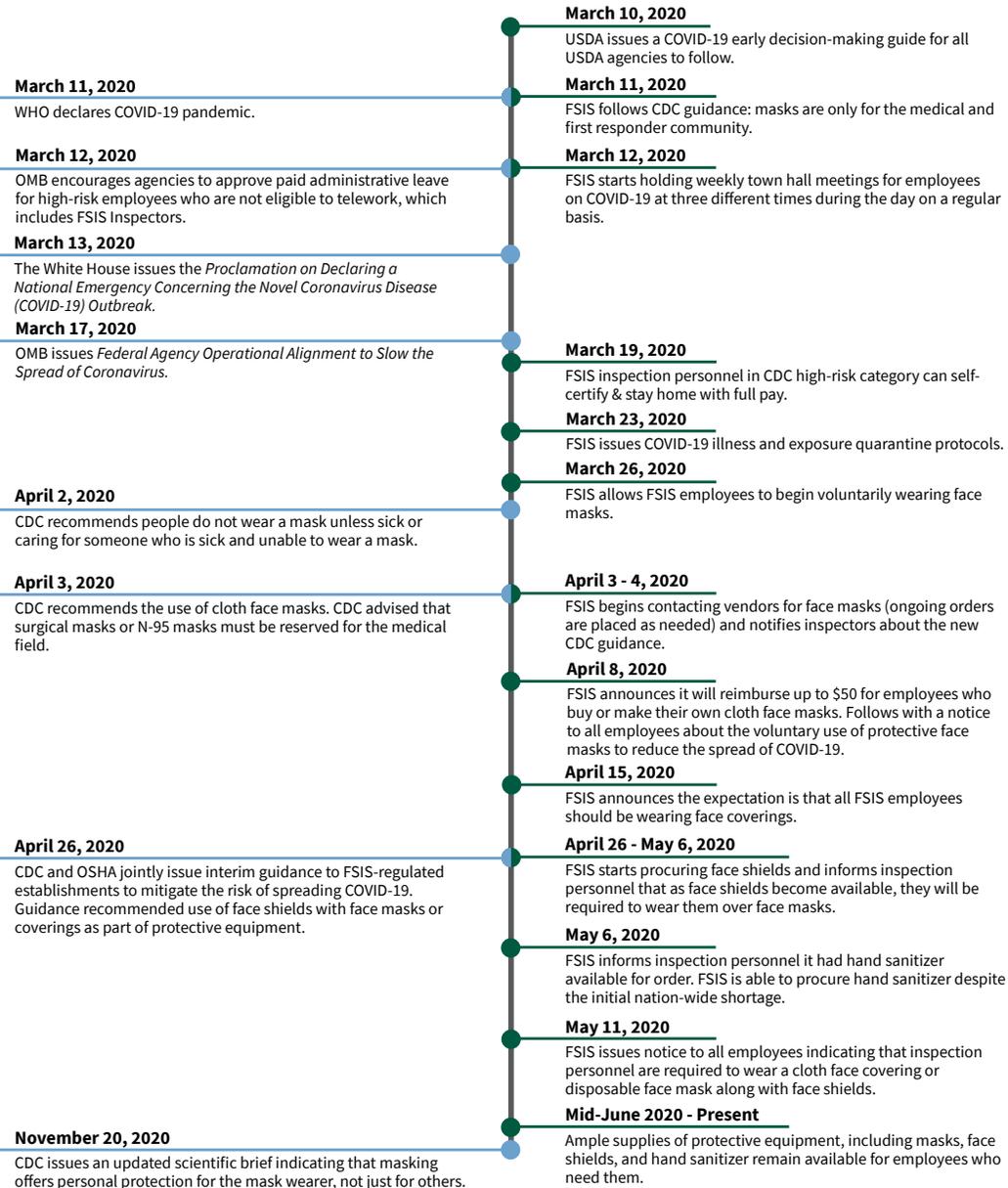
Both FSIS and a significant portion of the regulated industry have taken steps to mitigate occupational risks associated with COVID-19. As noted above, FSIS has made, and continues to make, significant progress since the start of the pandemic and FSIS employees now have access to protective equipment. FSIS-regulated establishments have instituted engineering and administrative controls that help mitigate the risk of COVID-19 to employees in accordance with CDC and OSHA's *Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers Interim Guidance*. Taken together, these factors have reduced the risk of FSIS employees being exposed to COVID-19 in the workplace.

FSIS COVID-19 Response Timeline

● Federal and Global Response

● USDA and FSIS Response

Prior to COVID-19, FSIS inspectors did not wear face masks except in specific animal-disease situations; therefore, FSIS had no mask stockpile or inventory.



FSIS COVID-19 Response

FSIS inspection personnel must be present at all establishments processing meat, poultry, and egg products to ensure Americans continue to have a safe food supply during the COVID-19 pandemic. FSIS provides inspection services at over 6,500 regulated facilities.

FSIS Employees & Regulated Facilities

8,700	7,100	740	6,500+
FSIS employees	FSIS Inspection Personnel	FSIS Inspection Personnel Who Self-Certified Without Loss of Pay*	Regulated Facilities

Protective Equipment**

\$23,285	53,065
Reimbursed to Employees for Face Masks	Individual Protective Equipment Orders Shipped

Communication (March 2020 - April 2021)

83	1,170	23
Employee Town Halls	Employee Email Inquiries	Industry Calls

*FSIS took the unprecedented step of protecting its employees by allowing those inspectors in CDC's high-risk health categories to self-certify with their supervisor and excusing them from inspection duties until the risk from COVID-19 decreased.

**FSIS regulated establishments are required to provide protective equipment to FSIS inspection personnel if provided to their own establishment employees.



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