

## USDA Announces New “Humane Handling” Requirements for Suppliers of Meat to Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs

The **U.S. Department of Agriculture** (USDA) recently announced new humane handling and welfare guidelines that must be in place by July 1, 2013, for harvesting establishments that supply bovine (beef), porcine (pork) and/or ovine (sheep) raw materials that are used in finished products supplied to school lunch programs and other federal nutrition assistance programs. The USDA’s **Agricultural Marketing Service** (AMS) administers programs that facilitate the efficient, fair marketing of U.S. agricultural products, including food, fiber, and specialty crops.

The new and expanded requirements for meat-harvesting suppliers of government-administered food programs represent significant additional responsibilities for humane handling and welfare of animals. Currently, the USDA’s **Food Safety Inspection Service** (FSIS) does not require meat harvesting establishments to have in place a written humane handling program for the animals they process. Consequently, these new regulations have increased significantly the regulatory differences between FSIS harvesting plants that supply meat pursuant to a government-administered contract versus those suppliers who commercialize their harvesting solely in the private marketplace.

Listed below are some general highlights of the new regulatory amendments applicable to harvesters of beef, pork and lamb meat to school lunch and other government-administered programs:

- An internal steering committee needs to be set up at each meat supplier that sells or furnishes meat to a participating school or organization with a government-administered lunch program; that committee will be responsible and accountable for animal handling within the organization.
- Each supplier must adopt an employee training program that is based on the humane animal handling guidelines created by the **American Meat Institute** (AMI); currently, these guidelines are found in the “*Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines and Audit Guide, 2012 Edition* (2012 AMI Guidelines).
- As part of the AMI guideline compliance requirement, each participating supplier must prepare and follow a written quality management plan which addresses all provisions of Chapter 3: *Transportation Audit Guidelines* (cores 1 through 7) and Chapter 4 *Auditing Animal Handling and Stunning* (cores 1 through 7) contained within the 2012 AMI Guidelines.
- Humane handling training must be performed by an employee who has earned and maintained a certification of animal handling and welfare training, such as that offered by the **Professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization** (PAACO) or an equivalently recognized and credentialed organization.

- Training in humane handling practices must be conducted by the supplier at least once a year for each designated employee, and requires signed documentation for each employee and confirmation by signature of the designated certified trainer upon successful completion of the training.

All meat suppliers should take note of these new regulatory responsibilities. It is not difficult to envision these changes ultimately expanding into future directives and notices of the USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) for all harvesting establishments.

Details regarding these new humane handling requirements set forth in the AMS' Technical Requirements Schedule – Animal Handling and Welfare 2013 (TRS-AHW-2013), which is accessible online at [www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5084518](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5084518). Anyone having questions regarding the new regulations issued by AMS, contact us at: [foodlaw@gray-robinson.com](mailto:foodlaw@gray-robinson.com)