



The Honorable Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator  
261 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

Thank you for your letter dated August 11, 2020, requesting an investigation into the Federal actions that may have contributed to the spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in meat processing plants and other agricultural processing facilities. On November 4, 2020, we met with your staff to discuss the aforementioned concerns and our planned approach to accomplish an inspection regarding these matters.

In response to your concerns, we have initiated an inspection that will address the specific questions raised in your request. Our objectives will be to determine what actions the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) took relating to COVID-19 to ensure the continuation of inspection operations at meat and poultry slaughter and processing establishments. Specifically, we will determine:

1. How FSIS spent its \$33 million in CARES Act funding;
2. What actions FSIS took to ensure the health and safety of FSIS inspectors working at official establishments;
3. How FSIS ensured inspections continued at the establishments, including determining whether inspectors were transferred between establishments;
4. What actions FSIS took to communicate the Federal government's authority, standards, and expectations with the State Departments of Health;
5. Whether FSIS had sufficient critical resources to ensure reliable COVID-19 tests, personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, soap and warm water, workplace dividers, and disinfectant available to inspectors at all establishments;
6. FSIS' protocols for when an FSIS or establishment employee tested positive for COVID-19; and,
7. What actions FSIS took following the Executive Order issued on April 28, 2020, that affected outbreaks at meat and poultry processing and other agricultural facilities.

We are also conducting a pulse survey to obtain information about how FSIS' frontline inspectors perceive COVID-19 safety conditions in their work environments.

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We appreciate your interest in the work of this office. Should your staff have any questions, please have them contact Deltrick Johnson, Deputy Counsel, at (202) 494-3446.

Sincerely,

Phyllis K. Fong  
Inspector General