

# USDA Releases Final Rule Establishing Inspection Program For Siluriformes Fish, Including Catfish

*USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service Program Fulfills Requirement of the 2014 Farm Bill*

**WASHINGTON, Nov. 25, 2015-** Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) released a final rule establishing an inspection program for fish under the order Siluriformes, including catfish. The final rule, which applies to both domestically-raised and imported Siluriformes fish, was developed in order to implement provisions required by the 2014 Farm Bill. The rule will become effective in March 2016, 90 days after it publishes in the *Federal Register*.

"FSIS is committed to a smooth and gradual introduction to the new inspection program, which was mandated by the 2014 Farm Bill," said Al Almanza, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety. "The agency will conduct extensive outreach to domestic industry and international partners so that they fully understand FSIS' requirements prior to full implementation."

The March 2016 effective date of the rule begins an 18-month transitional implementation period for both domestic and international producers. On the March 2016 effective date, all Siluriformes fish, including catfish, will be under the regulatory jurisdiction of FSIS and no longer regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Before the effective date of the final rule, countries currently exporting product to the United States that wish to continue doing so must provide a list of establishments that currently export, as well as written documentation of their regulatory authority and compliance with existing FDA import requirements.

During the transitional period, FSIS will conduct inspection during all hours of operation at domestic establishments that slaughter and process Siluriformes fish, similar to inspection provided at meat and poultry slaughter and processing facilities, while also providing the establishments with close guidance to ensure that they understand FSIS' requirements. During this time, inspection program personnel will also be assigned to visit domestic Siluriformes fish processing establishments, at least once per quarter.

During the 18-month transitional period, FSIS will re-inspect and conduct species and residue sampling on imported Siluriformes fish shipments at least quarterly at U.S. import establishments on a random basis. Also, during the transitional period, countries wishing to continue exporting product to the United States after the transitional period must apply for an equivalency determination. Applications for equivalency must be complete by the end of the 18-month transitional period. FSIS will assist countries with their equivalency applications. Countries that submit completed documentation demonstrating equivalency by the 18-month deadline will be able to continue exporting to the United States while the agency conducts a full equivalency evaluation, which includes an on-site audit. If additional information is required, FSIS will request that the foreign country respond or resubmit complete equivalence documentation within 90 days of receiving FSIS's request.

Following the 18-month transitional period, inspection program personnel will continue to be assigned to conduct inspection during all hours of operation at domestic slaughter

and processing establishments, and at least once per shift at processing-only establishments, which is similar to requirements for other food products that FSIS regulates. Also beginning at the end of the 18-month transitional period, FSIS will re-inspect and conduct species and residue tests on all incoming shipments.

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service is the public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture responsible for ensuring that the nation's supply of meat, poultry and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. Regulations applying to the Siluriformes fish industry are adapted under the Federal Meat Inspection Act, as required by law under the 2014 Farm Bill.

The final rule can be found online

at: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/regulations/federal-register/interim-and-final-rules>.

Over the past six years, USDA has collaborated extensively with other federal partners to safeguard America's food supply, prevent foodborne illnesses and improve consumers' knowledge about the food they eat. USDA's FSIS is working [to strengthen federal food safety efforts](#) and develop strategies that emphasize a three-dimensional approach to prevent foodborne illness: prioritizing prevention; strengthening surveillance and enforcement; and improving response and recovery.

Consumers with food safety questions can "Ask Karen," the FSIS virtual representative available 24 hours a day at [AskKaren.gov](http://AskKaren.gov) or via smartphone at [m.askkaren.gov](http://m.askkaren.gov). The toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline ([1-888-674-6854](tel:1-888-674-6854)) is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) Monday through Friday. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. The online Electronic Consumer Complaint Monitoring System can also be accessed 24 hours a day at [www.fsis.usda.gov/reportproblem](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/reportproblem).