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By Electronic Submission (www.regulations.gov)

Rachel Edelstein
Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development
Food Safety and Inspection Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-3700

Re: *Salmonella* Framework for Raw Poultry Products (Docket No. FSIS-2023-0028)

Dear Ms. Edelstein:

The International Foodservice Distributors Association (IFDA) appreciates the opportunity to submit these comments in response to the Food Safety and Inspection Service's ("FSIS") proposed rule and proposed determination, "*Salmonella* Framework for Raw Poultry Products," 89 Fed. Reg. 64678 (August 7, 2024) (the "Proposed Framework").

About IFDA

IFDA is the premier trade association representing foodservice distributors throughout the United States and globally. IFDA members deliver 33 million cases of food and related products to more than one million professional kitchens daily, including restaurants, K-12 schools, colleges and universities, U.S. military and government facilities, hospitals and care facilities, hotels and resorts, and other foodservice operations. Foodservice distribution in the U.S. alone is a \$382 billion industry, employing 431,000 people and operating 17,100 distribution facilities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

IFDA members are deeply committed to food safety, and they devote considerable resources to compliance with federal, state, and local food safety regulations. Foodservice distributors play an integral role in managing the tremendously complex food supply chain, providing foodservice operators with a wide range of safe, high-quality, and affordable ingredients. The foodservice industry operates a just-in-time inventory model, keeping ingredients fresh and lowering costs, to the benefit of the consumer. IFDA shares FSIS's goal of reducing the rates of Salmonellosis and appreciates the agency's review of its existing approach to *Salmonella* control in raw poultry. We are concerned, however, that the Proposed Framework would cause widespread disruption in the foodservice supply chain, substantially increasing cost and complexity and reducing available product without meaningfully advancing FSIS's Healthy People 2030 objectives.

The raw poultry supply chain is especially complicated. Fresh raw poultry is highly perishable, with a short shelf life. It must be maintained under strict temperature controls and moved quickly from the processing plant to the end user to protect product safety, quality, and shelf life. Many foodservice operators purchase raw poultry to exacting specifications that are tailored specifically to their recipes, making it difficult to substitute products to backfill gaps in the supply.

We are concerned that the Proposed Framework would disrupt this complex supply chain in several key ways:

- **Product holds would complicate the supply chain and affect product availability.** The proposed finished product adulteration standard would require that any lot of raw chicken tested for *Salmonella*—whether by establishments or by FSIS—be held until the result is received, leading to hold times of at least 2-14 days. Raw poultry is highly perishable, and lengthy holds would significantly shorten or destroy the product's shelf life. The Proposed Framework indicates FSIS would test large-volume plants at least weekly, and any voluntary in-plant testing would also trigger a hold. Because holding product would be mandatory any time product is tested, these holds would be frequent but unpredictable. These holds would create uncertainty about the availability of raw poultry in the supply chain, creating the potential for periodic product unavailability, and it would all but guarantee a substantial disruption in the supply chain every week for every major processing plant. Such disruption would likely make the supply of raw poultry unreliable, requiring more complicated sourcing strategies to try to mitigate the effects. For example, companies may be incentivized to build buffer inventories of raw poultry, requiring costly storage and additional labor and shortening product shelf life. Regardless of how holds are handled, they would fundamentally change the nature of the efficient, just-in-time model.
- **Expanded cold storage demand would drive up costs for all companies in the supply chain.** IFDA also understands that the poultry industry lacks anywhere near enough cold storage capacity to hold product pending test results. This would increase demand for third-party cold storage services against a fixed capacity, raising storage costs for all refrigerated commodities. Poultry processors may opt to rent refrigerated trailers to hold product onsite at the processing facility. There is a finite inventory of refrigerated trailers that can handle these types of products, and increased demand for stationary temporary storage would put upward cost pressures on the entire market, raising costs for IFDA members and any other companies with a preexisting need for refrigerated trailers. Moreover, these trailers are expensive to rent and operate (including through substantial fuel consumption while idling to run the refrigeration units), and third-party cold storage is costly, which likely would raise the prices paid for raw poultry by our members, foodservice operators, and ultimately consumers.

Ultimately, the Proposed Framework would require significant capital expenditures to build many new cold storage facilities, further adding costs to the supply chain.

- **Novel lotting practices would complicate traceability and inventory management.** Raw poultry processors would need to develop entirely new lotting practices to maintain lot integrity across a complicated production process or to establish microbiological independence at a number of production steps. IFDA understands that raw poultry production processes are complex, with a single chicken or turkey carcass having the potential to be converted into any number of different products across a number of production lines and even across multiple plants. Different products are produced at different rates, meaning that it may not even be possible to link lots by production time. Lot traceability is maintained for products through distribution, but it is functionally impossible to track how different products from the same bird or flock (e.g., chicken breasts, thighs, wings, etc.) make their way through the supply chain. Establishing new lotting practices would be very difficult for poultry processors, and complicated and uncertain lotting would place increased demands and risks on foodservice distributors, who operate at a key step in the supply chain.
- **Disrupting production and distribution would raise costs for foodservice operators and consumers.** The issues mentioned above, and many others, would directly inject considerable costs and delays into the raw poultry supply chain, which currently operates as a very efficient just-in-time process. Product holds would decrease the supply of raw poultry and compromise product value through shortened shelf life. Processors would incur cold storage costs for all held product, through costly cold storage locations or trailer rentals. Other cold storage users would face higher prices for their own cold storage needs due to substantially increased demand against an unchanged supply. On a longer-term basis, the industry would incur the substantial additional capital costs associated with building and maintaining new cold storage facilities to increase overall capacity. Processors would incur considerable costs to establish and maintain lotting programs, and foodservice distributors would have to follow suit. Lot control failures at a processing plant could have significant downstream consequences if product were found to be adulterated, imposing further costs and disruptions on foodservice distributors. All of these changes impose considerable costs on raw poultry processors, and many of these costs would be passed down the supply chain, raising costs for IFDA members, foodservice operators, and consumers.

These costs and disruptions would pose significant challenges for IFDA members and would undermine the efficient foodservice supply chain. They are especially troubling because FSIS's own analysis shows that the Proposed Framework would not substantially advance the agency's

Healthy People 2030 objectives and would not have a meaningful public health impact.¹ The foodservice industry, in particular, is especially well-equipped to handle raw poultry safely. Foodservice operators are well trained in proper preparation techniques, and we are not aware of a meaningful history of Salmonellosis illness associated with mishandled raw poultry at foodservice operations.

IFDA supports initiatives that measurably drive public health improvements, and our members follow a number of processes day in and day out to ensure they are handling food safely. We are concerned that the Proposed Framework would place significant burdens on foodservice distributors, harming the industry and ultimately consumers. We urge FSIS to reconsider the Proposed Framework in light of these concerns and evaluate whether alternative approaches would advance the agency's public health goals without imposing these considerable costs.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments on FSIS's Proposed Framework. IFDA would be pleased to provide FSIS with any additional information regarding the foodservice distribution sector that might be helpful to the agency as it further considers this proposal.

Sincerely,



Mala Parker
Vice President, Policy & Government Affairs
International Foodservice Distributors Association

¹ See 89 Fed. Reg. at 64739, tbl.34. Based on FSIS's projections, the Proposed Framework would be expected to change Salmonellosis rates associated with chicken by 0.19-0.80 percent and turkey by 1.23-4.92 percent.