

LIVINGSTON, Calif., Oct. 7, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- Food safety is Foster Farms' highest priority. Foster Farms is working in partnership with USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to reduce incidence of *Salmonella* Heidelberg on raw chicken products produced at three company facilities in Central California. Only raw chicken products are involved. This activity is in response to an FSIS-issued alert regarding the increased incidence of *Salmonella* Heidelberg infection caused by eating undercooked or improperly handled chicken. While the company, FSIS and CDC continue to investigate the issue, Foster Farms has instituted a number of additional food safety practices, processes and technology throughout company facilities that have already proven effective in controlling *Salmonella* in its Pacific Northwest operations earlier this year. No recall is in effect.

The FSIS alert states: "FSIS further reminds consumers of the critical importance of following package cooking instructions for frozen or fresh chicken products and general food safety guidelines when handling and preparing any raw meat or poultry.... All poultry products should be cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165° F as determined by a food thermometer. Using a food thermometer is the only way to know that food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy foodborne bacteria."

"We are committed to ensuring the safety of our products, and our family-owned company has maintained an excellent food safety record during its near 80-year history," said Foster Farms President Ron Foster. "We deeply regret any foodborne illness that may be associated with any of our products. Food safety is at the very heart of our business. It is a continuous process of improvement. In addition to collaborating with FSIS and CDC, the company has retained national experts in epidemiology and food safety technology to assess current practices and identify opportunities for further improvement."

"*Salmonella* is naturally occurring in poultry and can be fully eradicated if raw product is properly handled and fully cooked," said Dr. Robert O'Connor, the company's food safety chief and head veterinarian. "All poultry producers strive to reduce bacterial presence, including *Salmonella*. We take food safety very seriously. When the incidence of illnesses linked to

Salmonella

increased, we wanted to know why and we have worked quickly to identify and implement additional controls. It is also important to reassure the public that the FSIS process has not been affected by the recent government shutdown."

Salmonella Heidelberg is the nation's third most common strain of the *Salmonella* pathogen, which can result in foodborne illness if not destroyed by the heat of proper cooking.

Foster Farms reminds consumers to follow the Poultry ABCs – Always Be Careful. Raw poultry must be handled and cooked in accordance with the safe handling guidelines on all packages of chicken. These include: keeping the product refrigerated or frozen; thawing in refrigerator or microwave; keeping raw meat and poultry separate from other foods; washing working surfaces (including cutting boards), utensils and hands after touching raw meat or poultry; keeping hot foods hot; and refrigerating leftovers immediately or discarding. All fresh poultry products should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F as measured by a meat thermometer. Visit www.fosterfarms.com or call Foster Farms at 800-338-8051 to learn more.

SOURCE Foster Farms

RELATED LINKS <http://www.fosterfarms.com>