

U.S. upgrades processing plant inspections

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced a timetable Wednesday for introducing more robust, risk-based inspections at food processing plants.

Agriculture Department Undersecretary for Food Safety Richard Raymond said the refocused inspections will begin in April at 30 locations, representing about 254 establishments and potentially expanding to approximately 150 locations by the end of the year.

"To continue to prevent food-borne illness, we have to improve our prevention capabilities, not just respond quickly after an outbreak occurs," Raymond said. "Our inspectors visit every one of these plants every day and that won't change. What will change is we will no longer be treating every plant like every other plant in terms of its adverse public health potential and we will start using the information and the inspection expertise we already have in ways that better protect consumers."

Raymond said the focus of inspections at a processing plant will be based on a number of objective factors to be updated monthly, such as public health related inspection non-compliances and microbiological testing results.

He said the program's gradual implementation will ensure all aspects can be thoroughly evaluated and revised, as needed, before it is expanded nationwide.

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