



Richard T. Atkinson

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Regulatory Compliance expert with 25 years tenured professional experience at the US Department of Agriculture, Food Safety inspection Service. Worked as a regulatory inspector, Supervisory Inspector, EIAO, Investigator, Supervisory Investigator, and Deputy District Manager of slaughter, processing, labeling, packaging, and storage facilities for the Food Safety Inspection Services Division. Extensive knowledge of investigations, compliance assessment and auditing, and regulatory actions and recalls. Management advancement through GS level 14, including oversight of over 400 slaughter, and processing facilities, for the western US region and overseas territories. 6 years' Regulatory Consulting experience with the meat and poultry industry including expert witness services for civil litigation. Proud veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps.

EXPERIENCE

Praesidio Consulting LLC

November 2019 - Present

Owner / Chief Operating Officer

Regulatory consulting services, focusing on food safety compliance for the meat and poultry industry.

25+ years federal regulatory inspection, enforcement, investigation, and management experience parlayed into expert advocacy services for meat and poultry producers. Accomplished at obtaining solutions for regulatory compliance issues, regulatory personnel issues, resolution of food safety violations, operational challenges, import / export issues, and product retentions and recalls. Experienced in civil and criminal case compilation, documentation, investigations, and evidence collection and preservation. My diverse experience, ethical work standards, and successful performance record, have established a solid, nationwide, reputation for results throughout the federal regulatory system and meat production industry. As an industry advocate my skills are utilized to guide producers through the regulatory process and resolve their operational food safety issues. Examples include:

- Enforcement Action Appeals including Notices of Intended Enforcement, and Notices of Suspension which have all resulted in reduction or elimination of the actions.
- Industry Complaints relating to overbearing or unfair regulatory oversight. Established success in resolving problems between USDA FSIS personnel and plant management - ensuring fair and equitable enforcement within agency guidelines.
- Product Retentions and Detentions – Positive resolution of retention or detention actions.
- Recall Issues – Successful mitigation of product under scrutiny for potential recall and determine viable options for resolution.

- Experienced instructor and Subject Matter Expert of HACCP/ SSOP training programs for industry managers.
- Knowledgeable with U.S. rules and regulations regarding the importing and exporting of meat and poultry products. Skilled in the mitigation of import/export problems.
- Have assisted several attorneys with expert opinions on civil cases involving import, food safety compliance, distribution, product standards, foreign object adulteration, and labeling issues. I have been retained for 6 cases to date, 3 have been settled / resolved prior to court appearance, 1 resolved by summary judgement, 1 adjudicated, and 1 was Administratively Closed. I was deposed in 3 of those cases.

US Department of Agriculture

January 1994 – April 2019

Deputy District Manager, Denver CO (GS-14)

02/2016 – 04/2019

Managed, and directed 6 circuits within the Denver District spanning 10 western continental states, Hawaii, Alaska, and the territories of Guam, American Samoa and the Mariana Islands. Supervised a multi-disciplinary team consisting of 10 managers, affecting the everyday activities of approximately 200 in-plant personnel, including all EIAO activities and enforcement actions. Responsible for the implementation and verification of agency strategic goals in over 400 federally inspected meat and poultry plants to include:

- Ongoing scientific validation and verification of food safety systems by industry.
- Verification of activities related to Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures and HACCP to assure plant compliance with regulatory requirements.
- Ensured identification, documentation and implementation of regulatory control and administrative enforcement actions.
- Oversaw the completion of comprehensive Food Safety Assessments.

Co-authored a peer reviewed scientific article, Intensified Sampling in Response to a Salmonella Heidelberg Outbreak Associated with Multiple Establishments Within a Single Poultry Corporation, which was published by the scientific journal, Foodborne Pathogens and Disease, in March 2018, regarding a salmonella foodborne illness investigation.

Supervisory Investigator, Denver CO (GS-13)

03/2009 - 02/2016

Directly supervised 10 field investigators. Managed the implementation of surveillance reviews, FSIS Homeland Security objectives, investigations, and trace-back investigations. Developed regional staff and served as acting Regional Director on numerous occasions. Developed enforcement strategies and operations to protect public health.

These strategies include the effective oversight of surveillance and investigations activities throughout my area of responsibility through my direct reports. Independently supervised numerous complex investigations and illness outbreak trace backs. Involved in numerous projects that have been either difficult because of complexity or high profile in nature including:

- Coordinated numerous trace-back investigations involving multiple illnesses, resulting in several recalls, protecting public health. Worked closely with Office of Public Health Science's (OPHS) Applied Epidemiology Staff (AES).
- Received an Honor Award from the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases for “*Superior performance in leveraging a national Salmonella outbreak investigation to improve poultry safety in the United States*” in April 2014.
- Earned an assignment to support the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #11 – which supports state, tribal, and local authorities, and other federal agency efforts to control and eradicate, as appropriate, any outbreak of a highly contagious or economically devastating animal/zoonotic (i.e., transmitted between animals and people) disease, or any outbreak of an economically devastating plant pest or disease; and ensure the safety and security of the commercial food supply.
- Routinely created plans of action and assembled/lead teams to respond to different emergencies, which include natural disasters, illness outbreaks and other matters of public health significance.
- Coordinated numerous investigations of violations of the FMIA, PPIA and EPIA, with the various public health partners including the FDA, multiple states, and numerous county agencies.
- Promoted correlation with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, OIG, APHIS and other Federal agencies regarding emergency preparedness.
- Directed the activities for in-depth investigations of complex issues resulting in the legal prosecution of individuals. Worked closely with the Office of Field Operations District offices and have coordinated regulatory efforts between OFO and OIEA.
- In 2015 was detailed to the USDA FSIS OPHS AES staff. Tasked with evaluating incidents of foodborne hazards tracked in the Consumer Complaints Monitoring System. Responsible for reviewing consumer complaints and assessing their public health relevance. Examined the Public Health Information System and other information sources to link complaints with possible in-plant deficiencies. Initiated investigations for complaints of public health significance. Conferred with personnel in the Office of Field Operations and other program areas to identify potential food safety breakdowns and assisted users of CCMS as a system administrator.
- Provided instrumental input, factual data, and direct support for the issuance of a 2014 FSIS Directive Revision to update processes relating to the surveillance, methodology, and procedures for the investigation of food-borne illness outbreaks.
- Supervised and investigated import violations and implemented recall activities for Failure to Present violations and misbranding violations that either required a simple relabeling step and/or an official seizure action.

Investigator for OIEA, Denver CO (GS-12)

02/2008 - 03/2009

Conducted investigations relating to violations of the Food Safety Act, and regulations. Submitted cases for prosecution, and controlled products in commerce by detentions and civil seizures.

Assisted other agencies in the identification of, and control of, products implicated in food born illness outbreaks.

Planned and executed surveillance reviews of businesses that transport, store, and distribute meat and poultry products in commerce. Organized complex investigations and assisted with homeland security activities. In addition, Responsible for follow-up of consumer complaints about meat and poultry products in commerce, working directly in the Consumer Complaint Monitoring system (CCMS).

Extensive experience working illness outbreak traceback investigations, in collaboration with members of OPHS and state epidemiologists.

Front Line Supervisor, Sacramento, CA (GS-13)

09/2005 - 02/2008

Supervised 14 Consumer Safety Inspectors and 2 Public Health Veterinarians. Responsible for managing, planning, coordinating, execution and supervising the slaughter of livestock and poultry and/or processing of meat, poultry, and egg products; assessment of the scientific adequacy of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans, Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP's), verification sampling procedures and food defense for 45 establishments.

Coordinated joint technical and scientific reviews of corrective action plans by agency personnel including EIAO's, Consumer Safety Inspectors, District Office staff personnel, Technical Service Center employees and Office of Public Health and Science personnel. Regularly verified that enforcement actions were carried out appropriately and were legally supportable.

Enforcement Investigations & Analysis Officer, Alameda CA (GS-12)

01/2004 - 09/2005

Reviewed the statistical validity of sampling plans; verifying that laboratory analytical methods were adequate to demonstrate the effectiveness of establishment processes and safety of products produced.

- Observed, and evaluated processes for obtaining environmental/product samples, and assured analytical processes were performed as stated in control plan.
- Documented non-compliances and initiated regulatory control actions.
- Initiated administrative enforcement actions including NOIE's, suspensions, and administrative withdrawals, seizures, and detentions.

- Evaluated proposed corrective, and preventive measures, and developed verification plans to ensure implementation.
- Conducted investigations often leading to administrative or civil enforcement actions. Interviewed personnel and collected evidence.
- Lead investigative officer for numerous recalls.

- Analyzed system data (i.e. eADRS, PBIS, CCMS, LEARN) to identify trends or possible design flaws, epidemiological concerns, and emerging food safety issues.
- Routinely served as an agency representative for consumer safety matters, and liaison with a variety of state and local agencies, other federal agencies, and industry and consumer organizations.
- Facilitated numerous multi-day correlation meetings and training sessions.
- Often collaborated with members of OPHS and state epidemiologists.

Consumer Safety Inspector IIC, Los Angeles CA (GS-5/7/9)

01/1994 - 01/2004

Responsible for numerous slaughter and processing facilities of varying levels of complexity. Enforced rules, regulations, and procedures related to plant facilities, equipment, storage, handling, shipment of products, sanitation requirements, and adherence to government policies. Verified plant management compliance, identification of system failures, proper completion of required documentation, follow-up for correction and compliance, and regular statistical reports regarding microbiological testing and trend analysis of the Performance Based Inspection System. Implemented HACCP Plans, SSOP's and food security/homeland security procedures.