A. SUPPORTING STATEMENT JUSTIFICATION FOR CONSUMER FOCUS GROUPS (0583-NEW)

A1. Circumstances Making Collection of Information Necessary:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA, FSIS) is requesting approval for a new information collection related to the use of consumer focus groups.

FSIS has been delegated the authority to exercise the functions of the Secretary as provided in the Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA) (21 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA) (21 U.S.C. 451 et seq.), and the Egg Products Inspection Act (EPIA) (21 U.S.C. 1031 et seq.). These statutes mandate that FSIS protect the public by verifying that meat and poultry products are safe, wholesome, unadulterated, and properly labeled and packaged. To assist in fulfilling its public health mission, FSIS needs at times to obtain information from consumers to assess the effectiveness of its consumer protection initiatives and to gain data to support Agency decision-making and policy formulation.

Foodborne illness is a significant public health problem in the United States. Of particular concern are those populations at risk for foodborne illness—the very young, the very old, and individuals with compromised immune systems. Labeling information can be used to educate consumers to avoid higher-risk consumption choices and to help them follow the recommended safe handling practices. For consumer education efforts to be effective, FSIS needs to ensure that it has a clear understanding of who is at risk and of what mechanisms for delivering food safety and public health messages are likely to be successful. Thus, FSIS is seeking information about the content of public health messages, and methods of delivery of

those messages, that will promote safe food handling and preparation practices among consumers.

A2. How, By Whom, and Purpose Information Is To Be Used:

Consumer Focus Groups

FSIS has contracted with RTI International in Research Triangle Park, NC to test labeling messages on safe handling and preparation of meat, poultry, and egg products and to assess how well these messages convey information. The research will use consumer focus groups to determine the perceptions of segments of the general population and at-risk populations regarding relevant food safety labeling messages. FSIS will use the results of the focus groups to inform the development of labeling policy for meat, poultry, and egg products that will be useful in effecting behavioral change and reducing foodborne illness.

The Agency plans to use the findings from these focus groups to assess consumers' understanding and use of existing labeling features for meat, poultry, and egg products and consumers' response to possible changes in labeling requirements to enhance food safety and thus help prevent foodborne illness. These exploratory focus groups will provide valuable information to address several key issues regarding labeling of meat, poultry, and egg products. Specifically, the focus groups will address consumers' understanding and use of preparation instructions and other labeling features for prepared, but not-ready-to-eat meat and poultry products; consumers' understanding of cooking instructions for raw meat and poultry products, in particular letting product sit or stand for three minutes before eating to allow the product to come to a safe internal temperature; consumers' understanding of natural claims; and consumers' understanding and use of use-by and freeze-by dates on meat products packaged using carbon monoxide. The findings from these focus groups will be used along with findings from research

studies conducted by industry, input from industry and consumer advocates, and trade associations to inform labeling policy decisions. In the future, the Agency plans to work with FDA to ensure consistency in labeling, as well as perhaps to conduct joint surveys. Based on the findings from the exploratory focus groups, the Agency plans to conduct more rigorous follow up studies such as experimental Internet studies with a nationally representative sample of consumers before to proposing changes in label or labeling requirements or changes to other labeling-related policies.

Six different screening questionnaires will be used to screen different segments of the population to determine if the individuals screened are appropriate for the focus groups—questionnaires for the general population, the immunocompromised, parents of young children, older adults, young adults, and the underserved. There will be one focus group for the general population (adults 26 to 59 years old) in Raleigh, NC; two focus groups for the immunocompromised (Raleigh, NC and Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN); two focus groups for parents of young children (Raleigh, NC and Miami, FL); two focus groups for older adults (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN); two focus groups for young adults (Norwalk, CT and Phoenix, AZ); and two focus groups for the underserved (Norwalk, CT and Phoenix, AZ).

Each focus group will have a moderator who will use the moderator guide to conduct the focus group. Each focus group participant will complete a focus group participant worksheet and a consent form.

A3. Use of Improved Information Technology:

To interpret the study findings, the focus groups will be audio- and videotaped, and the audiotapes will be transcribed. No electronic copies of the questions will be provided to the participants before the focus group meeting.

A4. Efforts to Identify and Avoid Duplication:

No USDA agency or any other Government agency requires information relating to consumer focus groups. There is no available information that can be used or modified.

A5. Methods to Minimize Burden on Small Business Entities:

Only consumers will be surveyed.

A6. Consequences of Less Frequent Data Collection:

This is not a periodic data collection. If FSIS did not collect this information from the public, the Agency would not have the best information to use in developing policies and in allocating of resources to help reduce foodborne illnesses.

A7. Circumstances That Would Cause The Information Collection To Be Conducted in a Manner:

- requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly;
- requiring respondents to prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it;
- requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document;
- requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years;
- in connection with a statistical survey, that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study;
- requiring the use of a statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and

approved by OMB;

- that includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use; or
- requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secret, or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.

All information collection and recordkeeping activities in this submission are consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.6.

A8. Consultations with Persons outside the Agency

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, FSIS published a 60-day notice requesting comments regarding this information collection request (73 FR 7850; February 20, 2009). The Agency received five comments. Four comments were from trade associations and one comment was from a private citizen. One comment recommended that FSIS use alternative methods (especially observation research) other than consumer focus groups. One comment praised the use of consumer focus groups. Another comment suggested using other techniques to obtain better results. And one comment said that FSIS and FDA were not doing their job of protecting the public. FSIS will consider using alternate methods of gathering consumer data in the future.

The Methods Branch from the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) reviewed the study design.

A consulting firm conducted a pilot test of the focus groups with eight consumers; it took

the consumers approximately 120 minutes to answer the focus group questions (Sheryl Cates; 919/541-6810).

A9. Payments to Respondents:

To encourage participation, each focus group participant will receive a cash honorarium of $75 and a free gift (food thermometer) for participating in the focus group.

A10. Assurance of Confidentiality:

The confidentiality of the focus group participants will be assured by using an independent contractor to collect the information, by enacting procedures to prevent unauthorized access to respondent data, and by preventing the public disclosure of the responses of individual participants.

A11. Questions of a Sensitive Nature:

During the recruitment of potential participants for the focus groups with the underserved population (high school education or less and annual income less than $25,000), individuals will be asked an income question to determine their eligibility for the study. During the focus group discussions, participants will not be asked any questions that are personal or sensitive in nature.

A12. Estimates of Respondent Burden:

The total annual burden associated with this information collection is 215 hours.

FSIS estimates that 132 respondents who are recruited and screened will be eligible to participate in the focus groups and it will take an average of 0.17 hours per respondent for an annual total of 22 burden hours.

RECRUITING & SCREENING: ELIGIBLE RESPONDENTS

Type of Respondent	No. of Respondents	No. of Responses per Respondent	Total Annual Responses	Average Burden Hours per Response	Total Annual Hour Burden
Consumers	132	1	132	0.17	22

FSIS estimates that 80 consumers who are asked to be screened to participate in the focus groups will decline to participate and it will take 0.003 hours per response with an annual total of 2 burden hours

RECRUITING & SCREENING: NONRESPONDENTS

Type of Respondent	No. of Respondents	No. of Responses per Respondent	Total Annual Responses	Average Burden Hours per Response	Total Annual Hour Burden
Consumers	80	1	80	0.03	2

FSIS estimates that 188 consumers who are recruited and screened will not be eligible to participate in the focus groups and it will take 0.03 hours per response with an annual total of 15 burden hours.

RECRUITING & SCREENING: INELIGIBLES

Type of Respondent	No. of Respondents	No. of Responses per Respondent	Total Annual Responses	Average Burden Hours per Response	Total Annual Hour Burden
Consumers	188	1	188	0.08	15

FSIS estimates that 88 respondents will spend 2 hours participating in the consumer focus

groups for an annual total of 176 burden hours.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

Type of Respondent	No. of Respondents	No. of Responses per Respondent	Total Annual Responses	Average Burden Hours per Response	Total Annual Hour Burden
Consumers	88	1	88	2.0	176

The cost to the respondents is estimated at $2,580. The Agency estimates that it will cost respondents $12 an hour in loss of potential salary by participating in the focus groups. Respondents will spend an annual total of 215 hours and $2,580.

A13. Capital and Start-up Cost and Subsequent Maintenance:

There are no capital and start-up costs and subsequent maintenance burdens.

A14. Annual Cost to Federal Government:

The cost to the Federal Government for these information collection requirements is $136,907. The costs arise from the time spent by the contractor designing the study, conducting the focus groups, and analyzing the data.

A15. Reasons For Changes in Burden:

There is a new information collection resulting in a program change.

A16. Tabulation, Analysis, And Publication Plans:

Once OMB approval is received, it will take 3 months to recruit individuals and conduct the 11 focus groups. The contractor will provide FSIS a draft report of the focus group discussions within 30 days of the last focus group and will provide a final report 10 days after

FSIS provides comments on the draft report. No statistical analyses will be conducted and there are no plans to publish the data for statistical use.

A17. Display of Expiration Date for OMB Approval

FSIS will display the OMB approval number on any instructions it publishes relating to recordkeeping activities.

A18. Exceptions to the Certification:

There are no exceptions to the certification. This information collection accords with the certification in item 19 of the OMB 83-I.