

Steps in Sampling

There are 5 general steps in actually sampling product.

1. Determine which product to sample
2. Notify plant management
3. Collect the sample
4. Pack and mail the sample and form
5. React to the results

Step 1: Determine Which Product to Sample

FSIS has several sampling programs. CSIs collect RTE samples under the following sampling project codes:

ALLRTE: Inspection personnel *randomly* collect any RTE product (post-lethality exposed RTE product **and** non-post-lethality exposed RTE products) produced. Exceptions are listed in FSIS Directive 10,210.1, amend. 6.

RTE001: Inspection program personnel follow the risk-based priority list in FSIS Directive 10,240.4, Rev.1 (see below) to determine which type of post-lethality exposed RTE product to select. This sampling project includes **only** the collection of **post-lethality exposed product**. Select the highest risk post-lethality exposed RTE product produced at the time of collection.

RTE001 Priority:

1. Deli-meats that are sliced in the federal establishment
2. Deli-meats shipped whole from the federal establishment (this does not include cook-in-bag products; only those exposed post-lethality)
3. Hot dog products
4. Deli salads, pâtés, and meat spreads
5. Fully cooked-type products (other than cooked products in 1-4 above)
6. Fermented products
7. Dried products
8. Products labeled as "Keep Frozen"

Step 2: Notify Plant Management

Plant management must be notified whenever a sample is going to be taken. This gives management the option of holding the product represented by the sample pending test results. You should notify management enough in advance to allow them to hold the product, but not soon enough to allow them to alter the process. You should discuss the notification timeframe with plant management prior to any sample requests being received in order to have an agreed upon protocol in place. Refer to IKE 01-05, 02-05, and 03-05 for specific examples.

In the case of RTE products, you must give plant management a handout stating that you will take a sample and that the establishment may wish to voluntarily hold the product pending microbial analyses results. (See Attachment 1)

You should verify that all product represented by the sample (that is, the sampled lot) is held by the establishment, should it elect to do so.

Step 3: Collect the Sample

If possible, only collect the sample and mail the samples from the establishment's current day's production that has passed the pre-shipment record review. If not possible, such as in establishments where production is held off-site before completion of the pre-shipment record review, or the pre-shipment record review is performed at a later date, but there are no additional lethality or other pathogen control steps, collect samples of the current day's production, refrigerate or freeze them, keep them in a secure location, and postpone mailing the samples until the pre-shipment record review is complete, and the product is eligible for shipment. After the establishment completes the pre-shipment record review, you should prepare the samples to be sent to the laboratory on the next available Federal Express pickup day.

If, for whatever reason, the plant decides not to ship the sampled product, but to rework it or dispose of it, then you must discard the sample by returning it to the plant. In block 33 mark "other" and briefly describe why the sample was not collected. Send the form back to the lab identified in block 9.

In most cases, block 4 has a pre-printed date that tells you when to collect a sample. It will say "within 30 days of", that means within 30 days **after** the date printed, you should have collected a sample.

If the plant does not produce the requested product in the 30-day time frame, then you will check code 72 in block 33 of the requested sample form and return the form to the lab identified in block 9.

The sample must be in an intact consumer-ready package. Place the sample into the plastic bag provided by OCIO-DSMD. Identify the sample and place it in a secure location. The sample should be kept refrigerated until shipped.

Some products may be produced with components other than meat or poultry, such as RTE frozen dinners. If the product has the meat portion in a separate compartment (frozen dinners, snacks, etc.), then you must ensure that enough meat is available for the requested sample size. Several packages may need to be sent so that the laboratory has enough product to run the analyses.

Sometimes intact products may be very large. If a short-weight or slack-filled sample is not an option, contact the lab via Outlook and request a shipper large enough to contain the size sample you need to collect.

When a RTE sample does not appear intact because of the way the company packages product you should provide additional information, for example, "this is an intact sample," in block 28.

Step 4: Pack and Mail the Sample and Form

Complete the form. Complete all requested information on the form. The FSIS laboratories will discard any samples with incomplete forms. The following is a list of important blocks of the sample request form.

Block 9: Name & receiving laboratory – Filled in by laboratory; you should check the shipping container to see if the right address is on the shipping container.

Block 14: Project number

Block 18: Additional instructions – Read carefully to find out what sample needs to be taken for RTE sampling.

Block 19: Date collected – Enter the date you collected the sample. Check block 4 to make sure this date is after the date printed in block 4, but no more than 29 days after that date.

Block 20: Date sent to lab – Enter the date you mailed the sample.

Block 22: Product held – Check the “yes” box if the sampled/affected product was held, or check the “no” box if the establishment did not hold the product.

Block 28: Remarks – You must fill in requested information, such as,

- product name, production code, date or lot code.
- the time of sample collection (hour and minute).
- if the intact sample is short-weighted/slacked-filled.
- if the sample is dry or semi-dry fermented sausage.
- the name of the establishment contact person and phone number.
- a note that “This is an intact sample” if the sample does not appear intact.

Block 29: Collector’s signature – Sign your name.

Block 30: Name of collector – Print your name.

Block 31: Badge number – Put your badge number here. This identification is necessary for a traceable chain of custody if the Agency has to take the establishment to court based on the FSIS laboratory results.

Block 32: Telephone number at the establishment – Provide the telephone number where you can be reached at the establishment.

Identify sample and paperwork, and place them into the bag provided by the lab.

Double check the sample paperwork and the FedEx air-bill to make sure that the sample is sent to the lab indicated on the sample form. Follow the directions for sealing samples in FSIS Directive 7355.1, Rev. 2. Place one of the small bar code stickers from the 7 part sample seal set (7355-2A/B) on the bagged sample, and another on the sample form. Put the sample form in a bag to protect it. Put the sample and the form into a zip-lock bag, and attach the Identification Label, 7355-2B, by folding it down over the opening of the bag.

Pack the sample. Samples should be shipped in FSIS-furnished containers, unless special arrangements are made with the lab. Pack one sample per shipping container to avoid confusion. (If absolutely necessary, multiple samples can be sent in one container, as long as they each are accompanied by the appropriate completed form.)

The shipping containers you use should have been sealed by the lab with red and black striped tamper-evident tape across the top and bottom.

When multiple product packages are used for a single sample, all of them must be mailed in the same shipper.

Pack the sample in this order.

1. Freeze pack
2. Coolboard
3. Zip-lock bag containing the identified sample and paperwork
4. Extra small bar code sticker that was not used
5. Foam plug
6. Close shipper with Container Seal (7355-2A)

A frozen freeze pack must be added for product that was stored refrigerated or frozen. Shelf stable products should also contain the freeze pack to ensure that the product does not get over-heated during shipping. The “coolboard” goes on top of the freeze pack to separate the freeze pack from the sample. The bagged sample is then put into the shipper. Do not use filler material in the shipping container. Any unused bar code sticker needs to go into the shipper with the sample. This insures that it won't accidentally get used on another sample, and allows the lab to account for all 7 parts of the seal/label. Alternatively, the unused bar code may be retained with the file record of sample collection. The foam plug must be pushed down as far as possible to keep the sample from being tumbled inside the shipper.

Some types of RTE containers are not very durable, for example, plastic tubs and aluminum trays. If these containers are bounced around inside a shipper, they may crack or burst. In these cases, it is acceptable to put some packing material around the sides of the sample container to prevent the sample container from bouncing around inside the shipper.

An FSIS Laboratory Sample Container Seal (FSIS Form 7355-2A) must be put on the shipping container in such a way that it cannot be opened without disturbing the seal.

Mail the sample. Microbiology samples are mailed so they arrive at the lab the next day. You can mail samples on Friday because the contract carrier will deliver on Saturdays. (However, they do not pick-up on Saturday.) A “Saturday Delivery” label must be used. Put a checkmark in the “Saturday Delivery” portion of the delivery air-bill or stamp. Samples should not be held over the weekend if it is avoidable. However, if a sample must be held over the weekend it should be refrigerated or frozen, depending on the directive instructions.

FSIS Laboratories There are three FSIS Field Service Laboratories. The Eastern lab is in Athens, GA, the Midwest lab is in St. Louis, MO, and the Western lab is in Alameda, CA.

The FSIS labs are responsible for providing the sampling supplies. Whenever supplies are needed, e-mail a request through Outlook following FSIS Notice 54-02.

Step 5: React to Results

Access LEARN to track sample receipt and results. LEARN means Laboratory Electronic Application for Results Notification (see FSIS Directive 10,200.1). LEARN is a computer application that notifies FSIS personnel and establishment management of the receipt and status of samples sent to the FSIS analytical laboratories for testing. LEARN reports when a sample was received at the lab, if it was discarded and the reason for the discard, and the results of the analysis when it is completed.

When a sample is submitted for analysis, you must check LEARN the following day to see that the sample was received and was not discarded. After logging onto LEARN, you can view a 28-day history of sampling for an individual establishment by going to the following address.

<http://dchqintra/learn/estindex1.cfm>

When you go to the LEARN address, you have three options.

1. Enter the form number,
2. Enter a single establishment number to obtain all the results in the database for that establishment, or
3. Go to a customizable list of samples for all establishments in a circuit.

Option 3 is particularly useful if you have a patrol assignment, since you can see the status of the samples of all the establishments you are responsible for at one time, on one screen, without having to type in several different individual establishment numbers as in Option 1. You can narrow the information to show just a particular type of sample.

Click on “Submit” to see the collection date, the form number, and whether the sample was “Received” or “Not Analyzed”.

Once the analyses are complete, the results are posted in the results column. Microbial analyses results are reported as positive or negative and some are also listed as presumptive positive. OCIO-DSMD e-mails sample results to plants that have had their e-mail address entered into the plant profile of PBIS. **You should provide sample result information to establishment management even if the establishment receives e-mail notifications from OCIO-DSMD.**

Turnaround Time for Positive and Negative Results

Analysis	Minimum Number of Days from Receipt When the Result Is	
	Negative	Positive
<i>Salmonella</i>	1	5
<i>Listeria monocytogenes</i>	3	6
<i>E. coli</i> O157:H7	1	4