In 2011, USDA’s Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) announced that raw, non-intact beef products and raw, intact beef products intended for use in raw, non-intact beef products are adulterated if they contain the following six non-O157 Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC): 026, O45, O103, O111, O121, and O-145. FSIS identified these pathogens as adulterants because of their high pathogenicity, low infectious dose, transmissibility from person to person, and their thermal resistance being high enough to survive cooking. Despite these concerns, FSIS testing for these pathogens has lagged behind testing for E. coli O157:H7, and currently FSIS only tests beef manufacturing trimmings samples for these non-0157 STEC.

In order to reduce the risk of food borne illness, FSIS recently announced that it is expanding its routine verification testing for these six non-O157 STEC to ground beef, bench trim, and other raw ground beef components (all of which are also currently tested for E. coli O157:H7). FSIS also intends to test for the six non-0157 STEC in ground beef samples that it collects at retail stores and in samples it collects from imported raw beef products.

Raw ground beef containing these non-0157 STEC has been linked to a number of serious foodborne outbreaks, and the changes are intended to both improve public health and reduce the costs associated with outbreak-related recalls. Comments on the proposed expanded testing are due August 3, 2020. Keller & Heckman will continue to monitor for any updates.
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