

Info Alert

National Conference of State Legislatures Office of State-Federal Relations

March 15, 2013

USDA Plans to Implement Meat Inspector Furloughs

On March 13, United States Department Agriculture (USDA) Undersecretary for Food Safety Elisabeth Hagen reported to the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee that in order to fulfill the requirements of the sequester each inspector will be furloughed one day a week, for a total of 11 days, before Sept. 20. Undersecretary Hagen seemed to agree with many members of the subcommittee that these furloughs could have a significant economic effect on the meat and livestock industry. Without inspectors, meatpacking plants are effectively idled until Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspectors return due to the fact that domestic meat or poultry cannot go to market without inspection.

As a result of the sequester, the FSIS budget will likely be cut by \$52.8 million, or five percent of the agency's annual budget. Undersecretary Hagen also noted that because 88 percent of the FSIS budget goes for salaries and benefits, all 9,212 FSIS employees will be furloughed.

However, in hopes of avoiding these furloughs, eight senators have introduced an amendment as part of the Senate's debate on its continuing resolution that would keep "essential" federal employees, including meat inspectors, from being furloughed as part of the sequester.

If you have any questions or would like further information please contact [Ben Husch](#) (202-624-7779) or [Melanie Condon](#) (202-624-3597).