

A Report from the Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) on the Regional Annual Meeting held in Boston, MA on January 10, 2017

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A key goal of the Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) is to foster multi-state, multi-disciplinary and multi-role collaboration to improve educational and performance outcomes among regional stakeholders. To this end, NECAFS joined with the Northeast Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NEASDA) to hold an inaugural annual meeting in Boston, MA on January 10, 2017. This meeting brought 57 state, regional and national partners together for a focused, one-day discussion on the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) in the Northeast Region of the US. For many, this was the first time state regulatory authorities and traditional state educational program leads met for such a discussion.

The main outcomes of the meeting included:

Fifty-seven (57) people working on the same topic around the region met in-person and actively engaged in meaningful dialogue on shared or complementary work.

A sharing culture and dynamic was initiated in which state regulatory, educational and industry organizations described their intended activities and identified opportunities for interagency, interstate and transdisciplinary coordination and collaboration.

Regional partners articulated areas of need where integrative organizations such as NECAFS and NEASDA can provide support and value. These emerging themes, concerns and questions are summarized below, along with some initial or potential plans to address them.

Emerging Themes, Concerns Voiced and Questions Raised	
Regulatory Topics	Planned or Potential Action
Outstanding questions surrounding farm inventory; level of detail, privacy, integration.	NASDA and FDA are addressing.
Concerns over conflicts of interest (auditors / inspectors providing tech support/pre compliance review at the same time).	Share planned and potential working models perhaps via the On Farm Readiness Review process.
Concerns about varying state programs limiting growers market access across state borders (hope that there is consistency or at least comity across state programs).	NASDA model law development and sharing among states of planned / proposed statutes and other implementation details.

Concerns that guidance from the FDA will not be available in time for implementation dates.	Add-on and supplemental materials may help to bridge the gap. The risk is that guidance might deviate from these materials.
Important for states to coordinate, plan and take advantage of available financial resources.	Share planned and potential working models perhaps via NECAFS webinar series.
Educational and Research Topics	Planned or Potential Action
Concerns that extension will not have the capacity to provide the level of technical assistance needed.	Improve regional collaboration and coordination through NECAFS to better articulate state level work and needs and to better support sharing of resources and fund-raising for necessary additional resources.
Getting enough people trained, and trained properly, that will be responsible for helping growers meeting implementation requirements.	Increase number of lead instructors in both PS and PC to ensure wide availability of courses. NECAFS' TSSP can support this financially, need improved coordination with National Alliances (PSA and FSPCA).
There is great work going on across the region: but there seems to be duplication and redundancy. Can we find a way to host a list of ongoing regional work or otherwise improve coordination and collaboration?	Need a clearinghouse for resources, people and projects to better understand the landscape and activity in the region. This is a near-term goal of the NECAFS website development effort.
Joint and Crosscutting Topics	Planned or Potential Action

Do Extension and Departments of Ag understand each other's roles? There should be more

Doreen Gubbay and Abe Brown from The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA) reported that State and Territory Cooperative Agreements have been awarded to enhance

Competition B – inspectional support of the competition A program

These awarded programs integrate with training and educational programming underway at academic institutions and with private sector partners in ways that are unique to each state as noted.

Connecticut	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
<p>USDA GAP audit program started in 2007 but stopped once comp grant was awarded. Waiting to find out exactly what FDA is looking for in inspection process. Hoping FDA will provide templates soon. Strategic plan is currently in development. Currently working with other agencies on a farm inventory. Partnership with Extension.</p>	<p>On average, 2 GAPs workshops per year. Has developed a post-harvest packing house training that went into a more detailed workshop covering packing house sanitation, has farmers building new packing houses and sharing details, GMPs, etc. Conducts farm visits and provides assistance writing food safety plans. Hosts PSA trainings. Hired a farmer to be on GAPs training team. Will offer Preventive Controls course in April; assisted URI last Nov and assisting UMASS in Jan 2017. Also teaches home food preservation.</p>
Delaware	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
<p>No regulatory representative present for this meeting.</p>	<p>UDE has a small team doing various GIP/GAP trainings and advanced produce safety training for growers regarding the behind the scenes of foodborne illness outbreaks. Collaborate nationally looking at irrigation water standards. Working to grow watermelons in the presence of raw poultry manure to follow pathogens from application to soil to detection on watermelon. Conducting quantitative risk analysis for FDA. Trying to branch out to other regions to collect data for this project. Involved with CONCERN (nexus of water, food and health) to look at non-traditional ag water sources to establish parameters for water.</p>
Maine	

MD has developed their own GAP certificate program with follow-up inspections. MD hosts buyer/grower meetings to discuss food safety, what are growers doing, what do buyers need, etc. Also, meet individually with buyers. MD & MA gave joint presentation. [See full presentation](#)

<p>Have completed GAP audits for many years. Have decided not to have GAP auditors involved with FSMA inspections given conflict of interest. Office Administrator hired to handle produce safety. Will soon meet with collaborators: state farm bureau, food industry alliance, grower associations, etc. It will be a challenge to identify farms in the state covered by FSMA. Have held a PSA training.</p>	<p>Hosts several GAPS trainings. Conducted a long term evaluation of the 2 day GAPS program, including cost of implementing farm food safety practices. Hosts postharvest wash water workshops. New: research program looking at water analysis water methods, lab validation methods: sensitivity, accuracy, and precision, and broccoli project: sanitation protocols.</p>
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<p>Pennsylvania</p>	
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<p>Updates on Regulatory Frameworks</p>	<p>Updates on Education and Research</p>
<p>No regulatory representative present for this</p>	<p>Developed a mushroom GAP course which was presented to USDA. Integrative research looking at Lm in mushroom processing facilities. Looking at processes for sanitation of food-contact surfaces. Will be in Washington State</p>

<p>limited regulatory staff, providing technical assistance and hiring additional staff. Have decided not to have GAP auditors involved with FSMA inspections given conflict of interest.</p>	<p>development. Hosting a train the trainer PSA course in 2017.</p>
<p>Vermont</p>	
<p>Updates on Regulatory Frameworks</p>	<p>Updates on Education and Research</p>

Last Name	First Name	Organization / Affiliation
Noonan	Roger	New England Farmers Union
Oehlke	Bonita	MA Department of Ag Resources
Parker	Jason	University of Vermont
Perry	Jennifer	University of Maine
Pivarnik	Lori	University of Rhode Island
Read	David	International Food Protection Training Institute (NCC)
Richard	Nicole	University of Rhode Island
Ross	Charles	University of Vermont
Schirmer	Steve	New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets
Sherman	Bruce	Connecticut Department of Agriculture
Smith	Colle	

THE PROJECT: As one of four regional centers (RC's) funded either by the FDA or USDA NIFA, the Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) is consolidating and coordinating food safety education efforts in a collaborative and consistent manner. The _____ of NECAFS (as a center) is to provide a sustainable, comprehensive food safety training, education and technical assistance program that assists small and mid-sized food producers and processors with FSMA compliance. Our _____ (as a project) is to build the regional network infrastructure necessary to support a national food safety system that increases the understanding and adoption of established food safety standards, evidence-based guidance, and protocols for those affected by FSMA rules and other food safety regulations and market requirements. Our _____ includes owners and operators of small and medium-sized produce farms, beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, small processors, and small fresh fruit and vegetable merchant wholesalers in the Northeast region. The _____ is led by a collaborative group of co-investigators who provide disciplinary (produce, process and infrastructure) and geographic diversity. The project is achieving these goals through the pursuit of the following objectives:

1. Establish Foundational Structure – Capture the Development and Implementation components of the project including Early-Stage Center Structure, Outreach, Recruitment and Training Plan, Center Strategic Plan Development & Development of a Communication Plan.
2. Build Capacity, Competency and Collaboration – Recruit and develop the regional “network” by leveraging the collective expertise of University partners and FDA to provide comprehensive information and educational events on topics related to FSMA regulations.
3. Develop Curricula and Deliver Educational Programs – Connect regulatory development and compliance requirements with science-based research and educational programs through cooperative activities between NECAFS partners, FDA, and Northeast state departments of agriculture.
4. Evaluate and Assess Progress and Impact – Make a Positive Impact: To Participants, To Trainers, & To Science. We will ensure this by implementing an overall evaluation plan.
5. Sustain Good Work – Prioritize achieving sustainability and will use the developed network structure to seek future external funds in support of collaborative educational programs and research initiatives.

NECAFS aims to improve food safety in the Northeast through the collaborative development of outreach and education efforts. Specifically, NECAFS will: collaborate to provide comprehensive information and educational events on topics related to FSMA regulations; educate our target audience, connecting regulatory development and compliance requirements with research and educational programs; we will aggregate information (i.e., one-stop shopping) for all stakeholders; and we will innovate, working collectively with stakeholders to prioritize issues, and facilitate research to address these issues in the Northeast U.S.

More information:

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