

A Report from the Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) Regarding Evaluation Conducted at the 2020 NECAFS Annual Conference and Meeting.

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Summary

Discussion and Results

The Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) held the 4th Annual Conference and Meeting in Philadelphia, PA February 11 – 12, 2020. Tuesday, February 11th started with a welcome and plenary session where the highlights of NECAFS were presented and the full conference participated in a group exercise selected to understand their current and future perception of NECAFS collaboration and sustainability activities. The morning session also featured regional project updates. The remainder of the day focused on workgroup meetings dedicated to Produce Safety and Preventive Controls for Human Food in two parallel tracks. Wednesday, February 12th featured national updates from federal partners (Regional Centers, FDA, USDA, Indigenous Food and Ag Initiative, Local Food Safety Collaboration, V ± o

Attendees were asked how they would rate NECAFS in the area of regional communication about food safety topics. NECAFS enewsletters and the website were provided as examples of this work. Figure 1 shows that on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent, respondents (n=16, 21%) rated NECAFS regional communication as excellent with a ranking of 5. At 41% (n=31), the majority of respondents rated NECAFS regional communication as a 4. Finally, 32% (n=24) of respondents rated this activity as a 3 and 7% (n=5) rated it a 2.

Communication rated highly among attendees, although it is important to note that these ratings dropped from 2019. Comments requested more email communication year-round, automatic subscription to NECAFS eNewsletter after attended the Annual Conference and Meeting, more awareness of resources, shorter and more targeted emails, and more articulation of needs from growers, processors and buyers.

Attendees were asked how they would rate NECAFS in the area of regional capacity, competency and collaboration. The following were provided as examples of this area of work: webinars, the training support stipend program, and working groups. Figure 2 shows that on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent, the respondents rated NECAFS regional capacity, competency and collaboration with 22% (n=17) choosing rating 5 and 51% (n=40) choosing rating 4. Finally, 27% (n=21), respondents rated NECAFS in this area as a 3.

Capacity, competency and collaboration rated well, however the ratings are lower than those in 2019. Respondents are interested in hearing from new voices during the Annual Conference and Meeting and throughout the year and have requested open conversation where new network members can become more involved in NECAFS.

Conference attendees were asked how they would rate NECAFS in the area of developing and delivering educational programs. The following were provided as examples of this area of work: training delivery support, the annual meeting and the Food Safety Resource Clearinghouse website. Figure 3 shows that on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent, respondents (30%, n=23) rated NECAFS regional communication as excellent with a ranking of 5. At 45% (n=34), the majority of respondents rated NECAFS regional communication as a 4. Finally, 24% (n=18) of respondents rated this capacity as a 3 and 1% (n=1) rated it as a 2.

Respondents are interested in more webinars and regular updates on what is available on the Clearinghouse. Similar to above, the rating for developing and delivering educational programs dropped from last year. Several respondents commented that they are new to NECAFS and are still getting connected and have not yet participated in programming other than the Annual Conference and Meeting.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Responses clearly articulated that they want more network communication through-out the year. NECAFS will focus on improved communication while tailoring programming to address the needs of both regulators and educators.

NECAFS is seeing increased participation as a result of outreach efforts by the National and State Departments of Agriculture and therefore, will create opportunities for these new voices to become involved and actively join the conversation.

The need for technical support of both processors and producers was articulated as a key challenge in the region. NECAFS will hire additional staff and submit grant proposals and work with our network to identify ways to support their needs so they can provide technical support.

Finally, the