A Report from the Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) Regarding Evaluation Conducted at the 2021 Virtual NECAFS Annual Conference and Meeting.

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The Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) held the 5th Annual Conference and Meeting virtually February 16 ς 18, 2021. February 16th featured a Northeast Regulator and Program Staff Working Meeting. The agenda included State Presentations with Round Table Q & A, Break Out Group Discussion, Concurrent Group Meetings. February 17th morning and afternoon networking, welcome and plenary session with NECAFS activity updates, and the remained of the day focused on workgroup meetings dedicated to the topics of produce safety and preventive controls. Following the formal program, participates joined a virtual poster session and visited with presenters. February 18th being with morning networking, welcome and plenary session with national updates from federal partners, concurrent workgroup meetings dedicated to the topics of produce safety and preventive controls, and the day concluded with report out and closing remarks.

NECAFS distributed a link to the evaluation tool at the conclusion of the meeting and asked attendees to complete. Approximately 160 people attended the event and 36 (23%) completed and returned evaluations. In 2021 the NECAFS Annual Conference and Meeting was held virtually which resulted inted and returned

- awareness around existing resources, and
- individual needs for produce safety community members.

Less common themes also emerged, including:

- different perspectives,

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Slightly less common themes that also emerged in response to this question included:

- taking a new approach in education or evaluation,
- work collectively,
- provides clarity and focus,
- better understanding of various stakeholder efforts, and
- will look for existing resources to use in education and outreach and reduce redundancy.

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while forming the new relationship(s). When in-person, respondents reported successfully developing integrated interdependent relationships based on similar needs, interests and goals that have potential to result in collective action. However, when virtual, respondents did not report this level of collaboration and valued networking and communication more. Several subthemes also emerged (although very minor in response total), including:

- sharing of resources,
- opportunity for collaboration on education/research/future funding,
- coordination that leads to enhanced project outputs, and
- enhances current projects.

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Subthemes also emerged, including:

- lack of understanding of how FSMA individually applies to operators,
- compliance and implementation by growers and processors for various reasons,
- engagement of hard-to-reach audiences, and
- variation across the region.

Respondents were particularly concerned with challenges surrounding communication between ά

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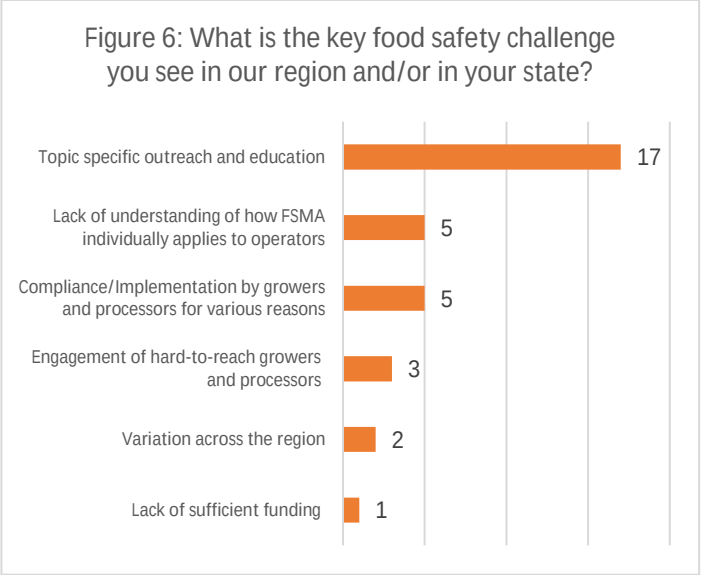

While there are challenges other than topic specific outreach and education listed, they are very few in number. The challenges in the region have shifted from compliance and implementation to the development and creation of more specific and tailored outreach and education that tackles individual topics.

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- networking and communication with other stakeholders.

Several subthemes emerged, including:

- learned about new resources,
- information sharing that provided insight, and
- new opportunities.

Networking and communication has long been one of the leading, if not the top, benefit NECAFS provides to its

While communication generally rated highly among attendees there were specific calls for improvement. One attendee noted

Like above, the rating for developing and delivering educational programs is consistent with the 2020 ratings. Respondents ℕŜLJ2ℕűŜŘ űKI·ű λű ά

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Responses clearly articulated value in the topic specific focus of the NECAFS Annual Conference and Meeting agenda and will continue to frame future agenda similarly.

The opportunities created to support networking in a virtual environment were successful. However, after two years of hosting the Annual Meeting virtually, we see that respondents