



Annual Meeting Summary Report: Year One

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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Elizabeth J. Newbold – UVM Extension, Center Administrator

Christopher W. Callahan – UVM Extension, Project Director

Michael Botelho – MA Department of Agricultural Resources

Nicole Richard – University of Rhode Island

Amanda Kinchla – University of Massachusetts

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Summary

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.

Meeting Outcomes

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.
Farmers and food businesses that are exempt – concern that there will be a decline in local food since buyers are going to start demanding that growers be “FSMA compliant”, i.e. market demand vs. regulatory requirement.	Work toward equal access to resources (e.g. training, capital, technical support) for all farms and businesses whether covered by the rules or not.

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.
There are a lot of needs assessments being conducted. Can NECAFS form a Regional Needs Assessment working group to guide a systematic literature review of existing assessments?	Conduct a systematic literature review of published needs assessments to reduce duplication of effort, comprehensively understand the needs of produce growers, and to inform future research.
Joint and Crosscutting Topics	Planned or Potential Action
Do Extension and Departments of Ag understand each other's roles? There should be more opportunities to allow for open communication between these groups.	Plan to use NECAFS monthly webinar series and future meetings as an opportunity to improve this understanding.
Is there any opportunity to provide financial support for the grower? There is a long way that growers need to go to adopt food safety.	There is a great opportunity to pursue increased funding in support of capital improvements with food safety benefit. A regional, multi-state proposal should be drafted specifically for this purpose. A revolving loan fund could also be established, although there is resistance to additional debt to cover food safety improvement costs when there is no likely price increase to support it.

Meeting Discussion

National Update

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 produce safety in preparation of implementation of FDA's rule.

Presentation discussed:

- Information Technology / Farm Inventory
- Strategic Planning
- Programmatic administrative project office contract information
- National Association of State Departments of Agriculture's (NASDA) role in assisting with the state produce safety cooperative agreements
- Proposed NASDA plan for coordination and sharing of work between states
- FoodShield overview

[Full presentation found here](#)

Regional Update

Art Johnstone from the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture reported that their goal is to promote partnerships between ag agencies, health agencies and extension groups.

They will strive to assist states in building a uniform structure that meets each individual state's needs. For example: they will be responsible for figuring out some of the nuts and bolts of the cooperative agreement requirements (e.g. how to do financial reporting) and then will disseminate that information to the states.

Farm inventory: NASDA is thinking about a strategy for collection. Current version includes collection of significant amounts of information however, NASDA doesn't expect states to collect ALL that information. They see the list as exhaustive and state's will start with a few pieces and build out overtime if needed.

On farm readiness: pre-audit walk-throughs will be offered in 6 states to pilot and refine the process before opening up for all states in 2018. State regulators and extension agents will work collaboratively with this pre-compliance, on-farm face-to-face process of walking through components necessary for compliance w/ Produce Safety Rule. This is envisioned as Phase 1 followed by further technical assistance provided to growers by states (which will be developed by the individual states). There is an on farm readiness tool kit currently being developed to be made available as a resource to states.

State Updates

In 2016, states were awarded cooperative agreements to support the regulatory implementation of FSMA through the FDA ORA's Cooperative Agreement Program (CAP). These cooperative agreements help to outline and implement regulatory educational programs and support inspections. States could apply for Competition A only or Competition A/B. More background: [State Produce Implementation Cooperative Agreement Program](#).

Competition A – education and outreach program

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
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.	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.
Delaware	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
No regulatory representative present for this meeting.	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.
Maine	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
No regulatory representative present for this meeting.	Process authority work. Will be offering PC for Human Food, Produce Safety, HACCP, and General Sanitation. Working with restaurants with regard to FSMA and the growers that they buy from. Conducting assessment to determine the needs of farmers, food businesses and processing industry. Dedicated people working in produce safety, preventive controls, and microbiology.
Maryland	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research

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 here	Have been conducting GAP trainings and mock audits for years. Will be focusing on Preventive Controls. Hosting 4-day trainings that targets growers with value added processing (day 1 = Produce Safety Rule and days 2-4 = Preventive Controls.) Offering fruit and veg technology course, wine making, beer making and food safety. Students learn about food safety and technology. Would love to collaborate with other Universities.
Massachusetts	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
MA has developed their own GAP certificate program. USDA GAP program was not being applied uniformly, which was a driving force for the development of MA program. Also, there was a need for technical assistance which was not provided via USDA GAP. MD & MA gave joint presentation. See full presentation here	Research to iron out challenges MA growers have experienced. Also works with food processors and growers who want to expand into value added products. Work to assist constituents in achieving regulatory compliance. Currently teaching: Better Process Control School; Produce Safety Education; various technical workshops including product development.
New Hampshire	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
Hiring a produce safety grant coordinator. Working with UNH to do primary education and outreach efforts.	Development of an on-line food safety toolbox. Conducted a survey in NH and a few focus group interviews to gather information for topics and formats for toolbox and website (New England Consortium for Food Entrepreneurs). This website is currently being updated. One representative from each state will have full access to website to make state-specific changes.
New Jersey	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
Estimates that there are 526 NJ farms that will fall under FSMA. Looking to hire an inspector.	Held 6 PSA trainings and 1 Train the Trainer in 2016. Conducting on-farm mock audits per grower requests. Developing materials and videos to use for education.
New York	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research

<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>
Pennsylvania	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
<p>No regulatory representative present for this meeting.</p>	<p>Developed a mushroom GAP course which was picked up by USDA. Integrative research looking at <i>Listeria monocytogenes</i> (Lm) in mushroom growing and processing facilities. Looking at validating thermal processes for sanitation of mushroom slicer. Looking at Lm in apple packing facilities on non-food-contact surfaces. Will be collaborating with Washington State to look at sanitation in apple packing houses. Food safety outreach program to work with Amish and Mennonite constituents. Offers GAPS and preventive controls workshops.</p>
Rhode Island	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
<p>URI, RI Department of Health, and RI Dept. Ag all working collaboratively. Hired a Produce Grant Manager. Gathering farm inventory data, in collaboration with URI & Dept. Ag. Developing a strategic plan.</p>	<p>URI is maintaining the RI GAP program with education and assistance. URI works closely with RI Department of Health on numerous programs to provide outreach education in line with regulatory compliance, as well as development of guidance documents. Providing support to incubator kitchens. Collaborative efforts with NE colleagues on numerous project including a NE needs assessment (300 grower respondents). Knowledge base from survey showed high knowledge of food safety principles for growers of medium and small size in region.</p>
West Virginia	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
<p>Working on an integrative approach with extension to create food safety training team, to include: Extension, Dept. Health and Dept. Ag. Dept. Ag will serve as liaison for food safety training team to take responsibility for training and technical assistance offered to farmers. Current issues include: multiple funding sources,</p>	<p>Water quality is an issue due to aging infrastructure; not a lot of farm land left; trying to approach food safety w/ a risk management perspective. Looking at options, cost and impact of FSMA and associated rules. Have hired a consultant to assist with food safety plan</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.	development. Hosting a train the trainer PSA course in 2017.
Vermont	
Updates on Regulatory Frameworks	Updates on Education and Research
Hired a program coordinator for produce safety. Hiring 4 people to assist with FSMA work: communication, outreach and technical, IT, and legal services regarding compliance. Looking to hire some inspection staff. See full presentation here	UVM research with approach from a farmer perspective to understand how they perceive agricultural issues and what motivates them to implement food safety practices. Emphasis of project is to increase grower food safety knowledge and design support for adopting scale-appropriate food safety practices that will reduce overall risk of foodborne illness and increase access to local and regional markets. UVM extension looking into produce tracking systems to aid in record keeping. Involved with manufacturers to designed equipment that is more aligned with food safety standards.

Other Updates

- The Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) came into existence in 2010 and launched the official FSMA curriculum training program in 2016. In the fall and winter of 2016 they conducted 20 train the trainer courses (training 622 people) and 23 grower training courses nationally (training 489 growers). All is going well because of collaboration.
- Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY) will be coordinating PSA training, technical assistance, buyer training, wash water sanitation, and pack shed practices. Looking at overlap of FSMA/MLP/GAP. Working with NOFA-VT to get inspectors up to speed. Will be hosting annual meeting for all FSOP grantees this spring.
- National Farmers Union (NFU) and NE Farmers Union (NEFU)
 - o NFU is conducting a needs assessment, to be followed-up with a listening session to validate and verify needs assessment data. Trying to offer low cost trainings for produce growers.
 - o NEFU upon guidance from FDA will generate FSMA compliance tools for farmers. Goal is to reduce burden on farmers and minimize the duplication of efforts.

Attendee Evaluation Summary

Attendees reported that they learned more about the details of cooperative agreements and that each state's approach to execution of those grants is very different, as well as awareness of some specifics of those different approaches. Especially an increased knowledge of farm inventory work. Similarly, they gained understanding of expectations of responsibilities during implementation and realized the amount of intricacies of multi-agency collaboration and communication. Attendees reported to have a broader understanding of the role of non-state, non-university stakeholder groups, such as NECAFS, NASDA and NEASDA and emphasized their plans to engage in more collaboration going forward.

Attendees gained a better understanding of regulatory confusion and thought the interactions with different stakeholders put into context the barriers to implementing FSMA. It was very helpful to have most of the players around the same table.

They described an increased knowledge of regional projects (research, education and regulation) and said the discussion facilitated ideas for improved work products and training. Discussion seemed to focus a lot on produce safety but not much discussion of preventive controls.

Attendees have a better awareness of the many efforts and information generation across the region and plan to exchange ideas and make connections in order to be helpful, and to be helped, in achieving common goals.

The most commonly voiced food safety challenge seen in the region is reaching and engaging the qualified exempt farmers. Similarly, reaching small food business and processors is seen as a challenge. There is a need for informational resources from the FDA and for future research to address outstanding compliance questions. Without more information, attendees voiced concern about overcoming these challenges.

Attendees

Last Name	First Name	Organization / Affiliation
Baldwin	Deanna	Maryland Department of Agriculture
Beaulieu	Justine	University of Maryland
Bernazzani	Diane	MA Department of Public Health - Food Protection Program
Bihn	Elizabeth	Cornell University / PSA / NECAFS Co-PI
Bolton	Jason	UMaine
Botelho	Michael	Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
Brown	Abe	U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Bryant	Heather	UNH Cooperative Extension
Callahan	Chris	UVM Extension / NECAFS Director
Cantelmo	Andre	Heron Pond Farm
Carnevale	Luca	Hope & Main
Concra	Kimberly	Barnstable County/Cape Cod Cooperative Extension
Feeney	Catherine	RIDOH
Fellenz	Andy	NOFA-NY
Ferelli	Angela Marie	University of Maryland
Finley	Aaron	New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets
Greene	Frank	State of Connecticut
Gubbay	Doreen	FDA
Hirsch	Diane	University of Connecticut
Johnstone	Art	National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
Kasacek	Wayne	Connecticut Department of Agriculture
Kinchla	Amanda	UMass Amherst / NECAFS Co-PI
Kleinguenther	Christian	New Jersey Department of Agriculture
Kline	Wes	Rutges Cooperative Extension
Kniel	Kali	University of Delaware
Kuehne	Sumner	State of Vermont, Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
LaBorde	Luke	Penn State University / NECAFS Co-PI
Luker	John	New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets
Machado	Robson	University of Maine
Martel	Cynthia	West Virginia Department of Agriculture
Matzen	Chelsea	National Farmers Union
Maul	Laura	Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
McCormick	Sean	Rhode Island Department of Health
McKeag	Lisa	UMass Extension
Mehlenbacher	Shelley	Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets
Mellion	Eliza	Simmons College
Moore	Jamie	Eat'n Park Hospitality Group
Neves	Priscilla	FDA ORA Office of Partnerships
Newbold	Elizabeth	UVM Extension / NECAFS

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	Colleen	State of New Hampshire
Sweet	Kristina	Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Utter	Alisha	University of Vermont
Violette	Catherine	UNH Cooperative Extension
Walsh	Christopher	University of Maryland / NECAFS Co-PI
Wentworth	Jason	Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
White	Catherine	RIDOH
Wilkins	Bruce G.	Agrinetix, LLC
Willard	Abbey	Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

About NECAFS

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 *long-term goal* 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 *overall objective* (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 *target audience* 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 *project team* 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:

Website: <http://go.uvm.edu/necafs>

Email: necafs@uvm.edu