

FDA Announces a New Cooperative Agreement Program to Advance Retail Food Safety

Constituent Update

October 27, 2020

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is pleased to announce the award of Retail Food Safety Association Collaboration Cooperative Agreements to three national associations representing state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) retail food safety programs: Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO), National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), and National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). The Conference for Food Protection (CFP) is also a sub-awardee under this cooperative agreement program.

The total funding for the cooperative agreement program is \$1.25 million. The amount awarded to each association varies based on the expected outcomes of their respective cooperative agreements. These cooperative agreements directly support the Agency's efforts to modernize the nation's retail food protection program under the [New Era of Smarter Food Safety](#).

"We want to work with stakeholders to reimagine how we approach retail food safety. We are serious about bending the curve of foodborne illness in this country by reducing the number of illnesses. To do that, we must do more to modernize and help ensure the safety of foods sold at restaurants and other retail establishments," says Frank Yiannas, Deputy FDA Commissioner for Food Policy and Response.

"Retail food establishments have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, many having to close – at least temporarily," adds Yiannas. "As they reopen and recover, we will continue to work with them and our state regulatory partners to help ensure that they have best practices in place."

These cooperative agreements will help the FDA to better leverage their national association partners to assist SLTT retail food programs in their efforts to reduce the occurrence of foodborne illness risk factors, implement and attain conformance with the Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards (Retail Program Standards), and advance a nationally integrated food safety system. As part of the two-year cooperative agreement program, AFDO, NEHA, NACCHO, and CFP will work collaboratively with the FDA to achieve the following national retail program objectives:

- Identify, assess, and promote industry and regulatory intervention strategies designed to reduce foodborne illness risk factor occurrence.

- Leverage the associations to enhance Retail Program Standards technical support to SLTTs through a “multiplier effect.”
- Assess and promote greater application of risk-based inspection methods by SLTT retail regulatory jurisdictions.
- Develop and promote use of an FDA Food Code adoption, implementation, and sustainability tool kit.
- Develop and implement a national strategy for promoting Food Code adoption.
- Enhance utilization of foodborne illness outbreak investigation resources and best practices by SLTT retail regulatory jurisdictions.
- Promote and connect available resources among retail food safety stakeholders.

In response to the award of these important cooperative agreements, Laurie Farmer, Director of the Office of State Cooperative Programs in FDA’s Office of Regulatory Affairs says, “Success for FDA’s Retail Food Protection Program requires the strategic engagement of stakeholders. These awards demonstrate the FDA’s commitment to modernize and build capacity through partnership and working collaboratively to achieve targeted objectives.”

Glenda Lewis, Director of the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition’s Retail Food Protection Staff, adds, “New Era is about thinking towards the future and working together to achieve the needed outcomes for a modernized approach to retail food safety. Collaborating together to achieve mutual goals such as with the Collaborative, is a path for doing this successfully and the Collaborative brings together national retail program thought leaders to help achieve success in reducing foodborne illness risks.”

Foodborne illness remains a major public health concern in the United States. Foodborne diseases cause approximately 48 million illnesses, 128,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000 deaths each year (Scallan et al., 2011). The annual economic burden from health losses due to foodborne illness is estimated at 77.7 billion dollars (Scharff, 2012). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2014), more than half of foodborne illness outbreaks that occur each year are associated with food from restaurants or retail food establishments.

Surveillance data from the CDC have consistently identified five major risk factors related to food safety practices within the retail food industry that contribute to foodborne illness: poor personal hygiene; improper food holding/time and temperature; contaminated equipment/lack of protection from contamination; inadequate cooking; and food obtained from unsafe sources. Most regulatory retail food inspection programs throughout the United States monitor these risk factors in their routine inspections, and each necessitates specific food safety behaviors and practices.

For additional information, please email the Office of Partnerships in FDA’s Office of Regulatory Affairs at OP.Feedback@fda.hhs.gov.