



May 14, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is pleased to announce the award of the “Advancing Conformance with the Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards (VNRFRPS) by State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial (SLTT) Retail Food Regulatory Agencies” Cooperative Agreement to the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA).

The intended outcome of this CAP is to advance the national integrated food safety system (IFSS) by assisting retail food regulatory programs in achieving conformance with the VNRFRPS or [Retail Program Standards](#). The cooperative agreement will also help the FDA to leverage NEHA’s strengths to assist SLTT retail food programs in their efforts to reduce the occurrence of foodborne illness risk factors, implement and attain conformance with the Retail Program Standards, and fully leverage SLTT retail food programs strengths to advance retail food safety.

The total funding for the cooperative agreement program is expected to be up to \$40 million over three years. The cooperative agreement directly supports the Agency’s efforts to modernize the nation’s retail food protection program under the New Era of Smarter Food Safety.

As part of the three-year cooperative agreement program, NEHA, will work collaboratively with the FDA to achieve the following objectives:

- Develop and implement a system to administer financial assistance to State, local, territorial, and tribal retail regulatory food programs based on the FDA’s VNRFRPS flexible funding model.
- Develop and implement a standardized method to assess training needs of retail food regulatory jurisdictions and facilitate meeting those needs.
- Develop and implement a tracking system that quantifies the extent of Standardization of regulatory food safety inspection personnel within, and among, regulatory retail food jurisdictions.

According to NEHA President Sandra Long, REHS, RS, “NEHA is honored to partner with the FDA on their revolutionary framework for retail food safety. We are committed to leveraging our Association’s unique reach and relationship with the local retail food regulatory community as we endeavor to build their capacity to ensure all families across our country enjoy the promise of food free from recognized hazards.”

In addition, Laurie Farmer, Director of the Office of State Cooperative Programs at FDA offered her thoughts on the announcement of the new award, “This is a momentous time in the history of retail food protection with FDA providing a significant amount of funding to support SLTT retail programs! This funding model was uniquely designed with our stakeholders and is intended to not only drive behavior change, but to also measure our progress in reducing foodborne illness at retail in this country. Retail jurisdictions, reach out to your FDA Retail Food Specialist and get yourselves ready to apply for this funding!” Jurisdictions can find their FDA Retail Food Specialist by going to [Directory of FDA Retail Food Specialists | FDA](#) .

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.

This message is being broadcast by the Division of Communications in FDA's Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA).

Thank you,

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