

FDA Announce Awards of Cooperative Agreement Program to Advance Retail Food Safety

Constituent Update

July 15, 2021

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is pleased to announce the partnership between the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) as part 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 awarded to NEHA.

NEHA will receive up to \$40 million over 3 years to directly support the Agency’s efforts to modernize the nation’s retail food protection program and advance conformance with the VNRFRPS. The VNRFRPS define what constitutes a highly effective and responsive program for the regulation of foodservice and retail food establishments.

The partnership between NEHA and NACCHO will continue the tremendously successful mentorship program that NACCHO has overseen since 2012. The mentorship program connects retail food regulatory program practitioners who are experienced in applying the VNRFRPS with those who are newly enrolled and looking for peer-to-peer assistance, resources, and recommendations for achieving specific standards. Experienced retail food regulatory programs advise participating agencies on how to start and best apply the Retail Standards to improve their programs. Mentees also gain insight on developing and implementing policies and procedures, completing self-assessments, and conducting verification audits. Resources and tools developed by program participants are shared with other regulatory programs.

“Peer to peer mentoring is an effective form of capacity building” said Dr. David Dyjack, NEHA CEO. “We are fortunate to collaborate with NACCHO to build upon their track record of excellence.”

NACCHO CEO Lori Tremmel Freeman remarked, “NACCHO is excited to begin work on this historic effort alongside our long-time partner, NEHA. With improved coordination and lasting relationships between these retail food regulatory associations and the FDA, we are looking forward to seeing a stronger and more harmonized approach that will support public health professionals leading our country’s retail food safety initiatives.”

Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) has held multiple cooperative agreements with NACCHO for the previous Mentorship Program. Glenda Lewis, Director, Retail Food Protection Staff, CFSAN commented, “CFSAN is happy to see NACCHO continue to administer the Mentorship Program through the Retail Flexible Funding Model (RFFM) in partnership with NEHA. Through NACCHO’s longstanding engagement with CFSAN during the first 10 cohorts of the Mentorship Program, NACCHO helped to establish a growing network of retail food regulatory programs experienced in the implementation of the Retail Program

Standards. CFSAN stands in support of the role FDA Retail Food Specialists play to assist our regulatory partner jurisdictions and the collaborative partnership between NACCHO and NEHA as this work continues.”

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.