

FDA Announces Award of Cooperative Agreement Program to Advance Retail Food Safety Constituent Update

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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 \$45 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 National Environmental Health Association is honored to continue the work of the NEHA-FDA Retail Flexible Funding Model Grant Program,” said Dr. David Dyjack, Chief Executive Officer at NEHA. “We look forward to our ongoing partnerships with state, local, tribal, and territorial jurisdictions to reduce foodborne illness across the country and thank the National Association for County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Conference for Food Protection (CFP) for their continued support and expertise as part of this invaluable program.” “Most of all, we extend our gratitude to the participating jurisdictions of this program whose dedication and hard work are essential to achieving healthy communities,” said Dyjack.

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.

NACCHO CEO Lori Tremmel Freeman remarked, “We at NACCHO are thrilled about the continued funding from the FDA to support the Retail Flexible Funding Model, which directly benefits local, state, territorial, and tribal health departments. This funding allows us to continue our collaboration with NEHA and FDA in providing technical assistance through the highly successful Retail Food Safety Mentorship Program. In pairing experienced jurisdictions with those just beginning to implement FDA’s Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards, mentorship accelerates retail food program developments and improvements. We look forward to building upon the successes of this program and continuing our partnership with NEHA and FDA to further enhance an integrated food safety system across the nation.”

Erik Mettler, Assistant Commissioner for the Office of Regulatory Affairs is pleased with the announcement of the award and commented, “Foodborne illness remains a major public health concern in the United States. Through the FDA partnership with NEHA, we assist our Co-Regulators in the State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial areas by investing resources to modernize their retail food protection programs and bend the curve of foodborne illness. The FDA is committed to keeping Americans safe and supporting efforts to move closer to a fully integrated food safety system.”

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.