



North Carolina Food Safety and Defense Task Force

Established 2003

Wednesday January 13, 2021
Zoom Meeting – Minutes: 62 participants

I. Welcome & Introductions – Nicole Lee

A. New attendees

Nicole kicked off the meeting reminding attendees of the purpose of the Task Force. Members represent state and local government, private industry, as well as academia. This meeting provides information sharing and collaboration to cultivate improvement in the food safety system.

Introductions/Re-introductions:

Dan Tew (Yum Brands); Debbie Hamrick (Farm Bureau); Gregory Evans (Walmart) covering for Paul Potter; Steve Tracey (Retail Business Services); Lindsey Kueffner (Retail Merchants Association)

- ### **B. Meet Me in 3 – Lynette Johnston, NC State University: highlighted her role in the Department of Food, Bioprocessing and Nutrition Sciences and introduced others on the call from NC State University, including Dana Hanson, Chris Gunter, and Chip Simmons.**

II. Agenda:

A. Review of minutes from November task force meeting

Veronica moves to approve; Courtney Matthews seconds; minutes are approved

B. Foodborne Illness Outbreak Update – DPH/NCDHHS

Veronica Bryant: An outbreak in Cabarrus County occurred in November where over 150 cases of were reported. While the agency was not able to determine the cause of the outbreak, all cases had a common exposure to sushi prepared at two local grocery stores in Cabarrus County. Clinical samples and food samples were tested, but no link was found. Full incubation periods passed with no additional cases, so outbreak was declared closed. Worked through outbreak with a good collaboration among NCDHHS and Cabarrus County health department.

Towards mid-December, a *Campylobacter* outbreak from a long term care facility occurred, with about 33 illnesses. Chatham County health department led investigation and traced the illnesses to chicken liver pate that was served. From this outbreak, agency discovered that testing capacity for *Campylobacter* in a food product is limited, but worked with NCDHHS meat and poultry division to process food samples. No deaths, one hospitalization occurred.

C. Membership Update Survey Results (closing at the end of the month)

Nicole mentioned that the purpose of the survey is to update the membership list and discover needed improvements. The survey is active until the end of January. Nicole provided an overview of the membership survey as it stands now. To date, there are 79 respondents; most respondents have been a member 5 or more years. Majority of members are from government agencies (63%); 24% represent private industry (mostly retail); 13% of membership represent academia (all from NC State University). Refer to the distributed presentation for more information.

III. **Business:**

A. Committee reports:

- **Executive Committee – Nicole Lee**

At the December Executive Committee meeting, discussion included networking ideas, conference planning, and website reactivation. End of year report was submitted with no issues.

- **FERC – Food Emergency Response and Communication (FERC) sub-committee– Sean Silva NC Dept. of Ag**

Most recent recall through NCDA Food and Drug Protection Division was the Publix holiday cookie platter for undeclared pecans. Several local Publix stores were impacted and recall effectiveness checks were conducted. Riverside Natural Foods for their banana chocolate chip data and nut bar for undeclared almonds; recall effectiveness checks were conducted. One NC retail chain impacted for this recall.

- **Crop/Produce – Chris Harris, NCDA&CS**

Since November, the group had conducted 31 produce inspections. They are continuing to do farm verifications and calling/emailing growers. The groups is also planning ahead for inspections based on commodity and growing seasons; also planning with collaborative partners (NC State extension) for outreach and education objectives using the Piedmont Research station and Mills River research station. In addition, a mobile produce packing line is available that can be used throughout NC and neighboring states for educational purposes. The group attended and participated in the National Produce Consortium which involved NASDA, FDA, Farm Bureau, and academia. Also participated in the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Grower's Association conference.

- **Dairy Committee/ Egg & Poultry Committee – NC DA & CS**

Daniel Gaines reported that the NC dairy industry is slowly becoming smaller, however, good news, three new dairies are being established in Madison, Cleveland, and Lincoln Counties. The National Egg Regulatory Officials is conducting a virtual annual training seminar in March 2021. FDA is about to launch an egg investigator job task analysis workshop; this is open to FDA regulators and state inspectors working together on this analysis which will develop consistency on how egg inspectors are trained.

- **Conference Planning Committee - Veronica Bryant**

This year's Task Force conference will be virtual on the afternoon of May 11 and morning of May 12; theme (innovative foods) will be the same as 2020. Veronica has reached out to confirm speakers and 4-5 are available, as of now. Executive committee will be developing an agenda soon. AHEC will facilitate meeting and deliver the conference live. Expenses will be covered with no problems, therefore the conference will likely be free for attendees. Attendees can gain the same CEUs as in the past. Check the website for more information. Veronica reminded the attendees to update your membership by the end of January, as this list will be updated soon on the Task Force's website.

- **Task Force Education and Exercise Committee – Candice Christian**

Requested interests and ideas for possible speakers. One idea involves a round table from restaurant owners/managers and produce growers talking about the impact of COVID-19 on their business. Contact Candice if you have ideas.

B. COVID Updates from All Stakeholders

Daniel: NCDA notifies firms at least a week prior to food facility inspections. This advanced notice allows both parties (NCDA and firm) to review COVID-19 protocols and identify if outbreaks are occurring at firms. A few inspections have been cancelled due to COVID-19 outbreaks within firms.

Nicole and Veronica: Increased efforts for vaccine distributions; working closely with local health departments and DHHS legal folks and industry about complaints of executive order compliance. DHHS has provided information for local health department to make it easier to send out information for compliance and state regional folks are following up with letters from the state that have not been returned. Legal teams have met with grocers regarding compliance issues; some of that information came from partnerships from this Task Force. Started to do office hours for local health department every Wednesday particularly for critical (red) counties (high COVID-19 cases).

Shane Smith: Inspection, Statistics and Fees Office (permit fees) is gathering data on the number of delinquent fees. Typically late fees can lead to suspension; however, suspensions were halted this year due to COVID-19. Not down that much in revenue compared to normal – 335 late facilities. Dispersement of fees back to the counties continues. Also give an update on frequency based on risk factor – last year that was reduced, looking to get that out to counties soon. Lots of complaints from consumers and sending out deployed regional staff on vaccine sites and local health departments.

Susan Thompson: School Nutrition Division of Department of Instruction; Currently in flux in regarding procedures in feeding children; have been granted waivers from USDA which allows feeding the children on-site. Superintendents and school boards continue to have to change based on how students are being instructed. Been working with Shane Smith's group, Dr. Ben Chapman's group and Veronica to navigate procedures for keeping children and food safe. These USDA waivers apply for feeding all kids through June 2021. Susan will be retiring at the end of the month. (All the best to you, Susan!) Dr. Lynn Harvey will appoint replacement.

Lindsey Kueffner (Retail Merchants Association): Reminded everyone of the need for compliance. Feel free to reach out to her and the organization she works with for information or help.

C. Other reports:

- Academic Reports: Chris Gunter reported that the academic semester is getting ready to start.
- Industry Reports: none
- Agency Reports: Shane Smith: NC received legislative authority to adopt 2017 Food Code (and any new updates); final meeting last week with questions and prepared to present that to the Rules Commission/public health commission. It will then be open for public comment. New work group that will start later this month will focus on institutional rule rewrite. If interested, reach out to Shane.

Michelle Howard (FDA): NC is 1 of 5 states invited to participate in the egg job task analysis that Daniel previously spoke about. Michelle reminded that the comment period for the food traceability rule has been extended to February 22nd. FDA is currently working on a recall for pet food that has resulted in death of 80 dogs. Michelle reported they are still under mission critical work (includes face to face inspections) and working remotely.

Donna Wanucha: FDA retail food specialist with FDA State Cooperative Programs – Big congrats to retail partners and Shane's group in moving the Food Code adoption forward – big impact for the industry allowing for certain processes being eased due to the language in the 2017 Food Code; the industry will be able to claim to meet Standard 1. Current FDA retail data collection is on pause due to COVID-19. In regards to task force support, funding is available through AFDO; in the past, one award was used to support the attendance of the Task Force

conference. We're now looking for ways to use this funding and promote participation among counties. Reach out to Donna if anyone has ideas.

Terry Ritter (DHHS, Field Supervisor): Chad Gambill has joined their group and they are now fully staffed. They are working on a couple of virtual trainings on permitting and transitional permitting; also have an institution refresher course.

IV. Speaker – U.S. Meat Supply During the Pandemic – Dana Hanson

Dr. Dana Hanson, from the Department of Food, Bioprocessing and Nutrition Sciences, provided a review on how COVID-19 has impacted the U.S. meat supply.

V. Adjournment