



North Carolina Food Safety and Defense Task Force

Established 2003

December 1, 2020

North Carolina Food Safety and Defense Task Force – 2020 Annual Report

The North Carolina Food Safety and Defense Task Force (“Task Force”) was established in 2003 for coordinating interagency and public-private efforts to enhance protection of the State’s food supply system and agricultural industry. Executive Order No. 47, issued by Governor Roy Cooper, requires the Food Safety and Defense Task Force to provide an annual report to the Governor that includes recommendations or proposals for changes in laws, rules, policies, and programs that the Task Force determines are appropriate to enhance food safety and defense in the State. The following is the annual report summary for 2020.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee, comprised of members established in Section three of the Executive Order, held six meetings in 2020. Meeting minutes for each Executive Committee meeting are available upon request and are provided as an update at bimonthly meetings of the Task Force.

The by-laws of the Executive Committee were updated in July 2019 to specify duties of the officers of the Executive Committee, and to establish specific roles for Past Chair, Chair, and Chair Elect. Elections are held annually in August. During August of 2020 Veronica Bryant from NCDHHS moved into the Past Chair position. Nicole Lee from NCDHHS moved into the Chair position and Lynette Johnston from NC State University (NC State University) was elected Chair Elect. Terms of office are September 1, 2020 to August 31, 2021.

Conference Planning Committee

The Task Force coordinated its annual conference entitled, “Innovative Foods” for May 12 and 13, 2020, at the Double Tree Hotel at Research Triangle Park in Durham. Eventbrite was used to improve the registration and payment process to an exclusive online format, resulting in an increase in conference fees. The decision to cancel the conference due to the pandemic and the inability of speakers to travel was made by the Executive Committee during the April 2020 meeting. A conference call was held with membership as a substitute for the canceled conference. The annual conference is funded by a grant allocated to the Task Force by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), registration fees, and sponsorships.

Food Emergency Response Communication Committee

The Food Emergency Response Communication (FERC) committee meets every Monday via phone conference to discuss food safety and emergency response concerns. The FERC objectives are to serve as a multi-agency food safety “core communication group,” provide situational awareness regarding events of food safety significance, identify projects to enhance

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response, and strengthen coordination for food emergencies. Multiple federal, state, and local jurisdictions as well as industry partners participate regularly in this meeting.

The North Carolina Food Safety and Defense Task Force has been viewed as a model to other states looking to establish similar groups. Both Virginia and South Carolina have attended meetings of the NC Task Force and Georgia attended the remote NC Task Force meetings in 2020.

Currently, the Task Force does not have any recommendations or proposals for changes in laws, rules, policies, or programs to enhance the State's food safety and defense. In last years' annual report, the task Force highlighted Session Law 2019-129, "Adopt Rules Incorporating 2017 Food Code," as a significant step towards updating NC's food protection standards. The Division of Public Health's Environmental Health Section is in the rulemaking process to adopt the 2017 Food Code and the task Force will continue to support this effort.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide an annual report regarding Task Force activities. An additional subgroup of the Food Safety Task Force includes the North Carolina Fresh Produce Safety Task Force. This Task Force works to identify avenues to provide outreach and education related to produce safety and promoting a food safety culture in NC. The annual report from the North Carolina Produce Task Force is attached with this report (see Appendix). Additional details on Task Force activities can be made available upon request.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Lee". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a rectangular box.

Nicole Lee
Chair, Executive Committee
NC Food Safety and Defense Task Force

APPENDIX

NC Produce Safety Task Force Annual Report Prepared by Elena Rogers, Chair October 2020

The NC Produce Safety Task Force (NCPSTF) continues to meet monthly to enhance communication among its members, allow for time for stakeholders to provide programmatic updates and discuss timely issues that affect the produce industry in NC and across the country. During 2019, members participated in the 2nd NC Produce Safety Professionals Conference that was held in Mills River, NC on October 10. This event was attended by 60 participants. The topic of this event was “Cleaning and sanitation” on produce operations. Nationally renowned speakers were in attendance from Academia, Industry and trade associations. Members also participated in farm tours in Henderson County and visited apple and tomato packing houses. We also hosted a number of invited speakers during our monthly meetings from regulatory agencies and academia to help us better understand issues affecting the produce industry.

Members include personnel from NC State University Produce Safety Team, NC Cooperative Extension, NCDA & CS Produce Safety Office, NC A&T University, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association and NC Farm Bureau.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic the NCPSTF has been able to meet via an online platform since March 2020 to discuss growers needs, resources developed by stakeholders and latest updates from the Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and the NC Department of Labor. Online platforms have allowed task force members to deliver educational programs to farms in order to help them understand how COVID-19 affects all those involved in fruit and vegetable production, how to properly clean, sanitize or disinfect work areas and how to apply guidance issued by CDC, FDA and DOL at the farm level.

Accomplishments from Team Members

NCDA & CS Produce Safety Office has conducted 33 On Farm Readiness Reviews (OFFR) and 26 inspections at farms. The program’s focus has been to assist growers, work on the farm inventory and complete the trainings necessary to successfully conduct inspections and investigations.

NC State University Produce Safety Team has continued to provide the Produce Safety Alliance Trainings for farm owners and supervisors (704 participants have attended to date), technical support to farms that request it, guidance to successfully conduct Good Agricultural Practices Audits and Certifications required by buyers and assistance with general produce safety and COVID-19 related information. During early 2020, three workshops were offered that discussed approaches to treating water on-farm. In addition, two hands-on workshops discussing cleaning and sanitation practices at produce farms were offered in Eastern and Western, NC. The content of these workshops was timely and critical as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. The produce safety team has participated in numerous webinars to help farmers address COVID-19 concerns and has conducted trainings in Spanish for farm workers.

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association has been heavily involved in the delivery both in person and online of the trainings to help farmers successfully complete food safety audits and GAP certifications.

North Carolina A & T has produced different videos to help farmers adopt technologies at the farm and provided assistance to small farms.