



North Carolina Food Safety and Defense Task Force

www.ncfoodsafetytaskforce.com

Established 2003

Wednesday, March 10, 2021, at 9:30am
Zoom Meeting Minutes (53 participants)

- I. **Welcome & Introductions** – Nicole Lee
 - A. New attendees and introduction: Genevieve Sinclair, food safety manager from Fresh Market and Jamie Stamey, independent food safety consultant
 - B. Meet Me in 3: Shane Smith, DHHS Food Protection Branch head and Veronica Bryant, DHHS Emergency Preparedness and Outbreak Coordinator introduced themselves and shared the importance of the Task Force in their roles.
- II. **Agenda:**
 - A. January minutes were approved: Shane Smith moved to approve; Chip Simmons provided second.
 - B. Foodborne Illness Outbreak Update – DPH/NCDHHS
Nicole Lee mentioned the Queso Fresco cheese listeriosis outbreak: no known NC cases.
- III. **Business:**
 - A. Committee reports:
 - **Executive Committee – Nicole Lee**
Nicole reported that the executive committee met in February, with a focus on discussing the upcoming annual conference. The committee also discussed future speaker topics, including COVID-19 and its impact on the retail industry, as well as the Food Traceability Rule. Nicole reminded everyone that if there are speaker ideas or interest, to please contact the Executive Committee. The committee meets on the even month of the year; if anyone is interested in joining the committee, please reach out to Nicole Lee, Veronica Bryant, or Lynette Johnston.
 - **FERC – Food Emergency Response and Communication (FERC) sub-committee – Sean Silva, NC Dept. of Ag (NCDA&CS)**
There have been few recalls since January; Think! brand oatmeal product issued a recall for undeclared allergens, few NC stores impacted. A recall on El Abuelito cheese products for possible Listeria contamination has expanded to over 100 stores; effectiveness checks are currently underway. Other recalls include a Quaker Oats bbq rice crisps for undeclared soy, one distributor impacted, so far, as well as a national meat and poultry recall. Environmental health reported a water main break in Maysville. Public health has also had some outbreaks of multistate *Salmonella* Typhimurium and *S. Hadar* with poultry (5-6 cases) and the other with handling turtles.
 - **Crop/Produce – Chris Harris, NCDA&CS**
Inspections have resumed for 2021 with a focus on growers that were missed in 2020. NCDA is now starting to inspect very small farms and continuing with large farms. Outreach activities planning and construction is continuing at the Mills River pack line. The Piedmont Research Station and the mobile pack line are ready for use. Collaborative partners (NCDA, FDA, NCSU, and United Fresh Produce Association) have been working on a pilot water workshop to promote a greater understanding of water distribution and treatment systems. The goal is to provide a two-day workshop: one day for industry and one day for regulators. Members of the NCDA produce program are continuing to identify farms for the farm inventory. NCDA and NCSU are still offering On-Farm Readiness Reviews. Sarah Cope has been busy with outreach and education activities at farmers market, retail stores and throughout the state.
 - **Dairy Committee/ Egg & Poultry Committee – Daniel Gaines, NCDA&CS**
No updates were reported for this month.
 - **Conference Planning Committee - Veronica Bryant**

The conference is planned for two partial days at no cost to Task Force members. The agenda is finalized with the theme of innovative foods. Wake AHEC is assisting with managing the conference and will be sending out the link for registration in April.

- **Task Force Education and Exercise Committee – Natalie Seymour, NC State University**

Natalie Seymour is temporarily filling in for Candice Christian. Feel free to reach out to Nicole if you are interested in speaking during future meetings.

B. COVID Updates from All Stakeholders

Nicole Lee mentioned that most efforts have been focused on COVID-19 vaccinations and mentioned that food workers are eligible for vaccines. Vaccine hesitancy has been a barrier for many.

Jeff Hawley mentioned that they are encouraging associates to get vaccinated; Jaymin Patel (director for food safety for Hardees) mentioned that they are giving employees 2 hours paid time to get vaccinated. Shane Smith reported that the food protection branch is helping with vaccine clinics on a volunteer basis throughout the state. Shane mentioned they are also starting to work with industrial hygiene on government clusters and government working environments.

C. Other reports:

- **Academic Reports**

Chip Simmons reported that NCSU is still doing COVID testing for NCSU students, staff, and faculty; low levels of positive cases, so far. NCSU Extension is now allowing up to go to a gathering of 25 people.

- **Industry Reports**

Lindsey Kueffner (Retail Merchants) reported that they mainly focused on COVID-19 and encouraged Task Force participants to reach out to her if there were any needs. Jeff Hawley (Harris Teeter) mentioned that the biggest challenge with COVID-19 is dealing with multiple policies representing local, city, regional areas; it's been difficult keeping up with local restriction and guidance; not just NC but other areas where Harris Teeter operates.

- **Agency Reports**

Daniel Gaines reported that NCDA&CS is handling the El Abuelito Listeria recall. They are currently involved with effectiveness checks through phone and site visits; they have encountered instances where the cheese was still on the shelf, which have typically been at smaller grocery stores. Veronica Bryant reported that Sean sent two restaurant that were in the distribution area, one in Columbus County and one in Moore County. They have followed up with local health department helping with effectiveness checks. Daniel mentioned that FDA is also involved in effectiveness checks with this product, representing a multi-agency response to this recall.

IV. Speaker – Dr. Ben Chapman

FoodCoVNET: A collaborative project at the intersection of COVID-19 and food safety

V. Adjournment

Jeff motioned to adjourn; Chip Simmons provided second.

NOTE: Our next full Task Force meeting would usually be on the 2nd Wednesday of the next odd numbered month (i.e. Wednesday, May 12), but this meeting will be replaced by our annual conference to be held virtually (via Zoom) on Tuesday afternoon, May 11, from 1-4pm and Wednesday morning, May 12, from 9am -12pm
