



North Carolina Food Safety and Defense Task Force

Established 2003

Wednesday November 18, 2020

(rescheduled from 11/11/2020 due to Veteran's Day holiday for state and local employees)

Zoom Meeting – 9:30am

Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome & Introductions

Meeting began with a welcome from Nicole Lee and introductions from new members, with 41 participants calling into the virtual meeting.

II. Agenda:

A. Review of minutes from September task force meeting

- No revisions were suggested. The September meeting minutes were approved upon Chip Simmons' move to accept and second by Shane Smith.

B. Foodborne Illness Outbreak Update – DPH/NCDHHS

- Nicole Lee reported that NC is part of a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Typhimurium, among 5 to 7 states involved. NC is reporting 20+ cases. Source is unknown; a national hypothesis generating questionnaire has been developed to better understand the outbreak.
- No other agency reported outbreaks or foodborne outbreaks.

III. Business:

A. Committee reports:

- **Executive Committee**

Nicole Lee reported that the committee met in October and discussed the 2021 conference preferences. Conference will be completely virtual over 2 half-days; a morning and an afternoon session. Topics will follow 2020 conference; currently following up with speakers. Governor's report will soon be finalized.

- **FERC – Food Emergency Response and Communication (FERC) sub-committee**

Sean Silva reported on recent recalls. Most recent includes the Tanimura and Antle, Inc. recall for possible *E. coli* contamination in lettuce. Only one retailer involved and product was already expired once recall was issued. Red Monkey Foods recalled parsley and herbs de provence for possible *Salmonella* contamination; Seneca cinnamon apple chips and Clancy's cinnamon apple chips recalled for possible *Salmonella* contamination. Overall, no major recalls and very few stores impacted. Marvin Lackman reported there have been very few meat and poultry recalls with no NC impacts.

- **NCDA & CS Crop/Produce**

Chris Harris reported that produce farm inspections have continued with 30 completed inspections to date. They are in the process of setting up future inspections. Due to weather and COVID-19, some harvests have ended early. The Produce Program is

working with the Produce Safety Task Force and NC State Extension on developing and implementing training while considering virtual options. The next Produce Safety Task Force meeting will focus on the food traceability rule and its impact on growers. Chris mentioned they are always looking for new avenues on how to reach growers and welcomed those interested to join the Fresh Produce Safety Task Force.

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

Daniel Gaines reported that a grade A permit was suspended due to inspection compliance issues. This dairy had products out in the market place; impacted product was embargoed. Since then, the firm's permit has been reinstated and they have continued operating.

- **Conference Planning Committee - Veronica Bryant**

Veronica Bryant updated the task force on the 2021 conference plans, thus far. Topics and theme will remain the same as 2020 conference (cancelled). Currently working through logistics of digital conferencing delivery platforms and resources needed. Quoted prices are high. We are looking for someone with experience in digital conference planning, as well as available funding. Suggestions for speakers are welcome, too.

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

Candice Christian reported that the task force is looking for a January speaker. If you have ideas or are interested in speaking, reach out to her or Nicole Lee.

B. COVID Updates from All Stakeholders

DHHS Food Protection Branch: Shane Smith reported that as COVID-19 cases rise, they are continuing to reach out to counties and industry to help reduce the number of cases. However, they are receiving a growing number of COVID-19 complaints on operations not following the state's guidelines. They are requesting partnerships with the industry to see how they can help enforce COVID guidelines and ease complaints. Lindsey Kueffner (NC Retail Merchants Association) and Paul Potter (Walmart) responded and are open to further discussions and potential partnerships with DHHS. Shane mentioned there is more information regarding COVID-19 on DHHS's webpage with the updated map and county hot zones.

C. Other reports:

- **Academic Reports**

North Carolina State University: Lynette Johnston updated the group on NC State Extension's activity. Virtual PCQI food safety training for food processors was conducted in October. Regulatory training for fresh produce growers is currently being planned for the winter months.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Safe and Healthy Schools Support Division: Susan Thompson reported that nutrition programs are continuing under the summer food service program, allowing food to be provided for children under the age of 18. They are working with organizations regarding COVID compliance concerns with meal preparation and delivery services; they are encouraging people to work with environmental health. Weekly and biweekly calls with school nutrition administrators are being held to update any changes to DHHS and USDA guidance.

- **Industry Reports**

NC Retail Merchants Association: Lindsey Kueffner reported their focus is on COVID-19; they are happy to be a resource to all within the Task Force.

- **Agency Reports**

NC Emergency Management: Sandi Bridges reported that hurricane season continues with consideration to COVID-19 protocols in place. Activities included help with severe weather last week (November 11 and 12) with flooding; Alexander County families living in campgrounds are now displaced; working with them to transition to permanent housing. In regards to COVID-19 assistance, continuing to support food banks and NC Department of Ag and staffing. NC National Guard is helping agriculture warehouse and food banks to help distribute food. National Guard is leaving December 16 as federal funding is running out. There will likely be a staffing gap and currently trying to figure out plans beyond funding. Feeding coordinators are working to identify gaps among feeding groups. Some EOC's have deactivated feeding groups, so potential gaps in food security are being monitored.

NCD & CS: Daniel Gaines reported on a complaint regarding baked goods that were incorrectly labeled and may have caused an illness. Product was manufactured at a facility in GA; NCD followed up with the GA Department of Agriculture and the retail facility that was selling the product and found incorrect labeling. FDA also investigated the processor to see if allergens were used and missing on allergen statement. Labels were improved as a result of this work among states (NC and GA) and agencies (state departments of agriculture and FDA).

DHHS Food Protection Branch: Terry Ritter (field supervisor) provided an update on trainings. They continue to provide centralized intern training which is now being taught virtually. The feedback from participants was good, but exam scores were low. They are working through improving the virtual course to make it more interactive through videos and real-life examples. They are also working on building an intuition refresher course which will begin in 2021 and working to make the permitting course into one-day virtual course. They have had several counties with a lot of turnover and early retirements due to COVID, which has required training assistance due to loss of staffing. They are hiring a new staff member soon and will then be fully staffed.

FDA: Michele Howard reported they continue to conduct mission critical work and are now doing romaine sampling due to recent outbreaks. This is a nation-wide assignment. They are continuing to work on new era of smarter food safety and have webinars scheduled for implementing new technologies and tools to help trace foods to improve response to outbreaks. They continue to use an existing tool to designate areas where inspections will occur based on COVID-19 case numbers.

IV. Speaker

David Buckley, scientist from Diversey, spoke on the appropriate applications of antimicrobial pesticides according to EPA and FDA regulations, as well as an evaluation of technologies within food settings.

V. Adjournment