

A Report from the Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) Regarding
Evaluation Conducted at the 2022 Virtual

with morning networking, welcome and plenary session with national updates from federal partners, concurrent workgroup meetings dedicated to the topics of produce safety and preventive controls, and the day concluded with report out and closing remarks.

NECAFS distributed a link to the evaluation tool at the conclusion of the meeting and asked attendees to complete. Approximately 150 people attended the event and 34 (23%) completed and returned evaluations. In 2022 the NECAFS Annual Conference and Meeting was held virtually which resulted in fewer responses to the evaluation. When in-person, a paper evaluation is distributed, and participants are given time during the event to provide feedback and we receive around a 55% response rate. When asked to respond on their own in a virtual setting, respondents to not provide feedback at the same rate as when in-person and given time to respond.

On the evaluation, attendees reported on both their perceptions of (1) the 2022 NECAFS Annual Conference and Meeting and (2) the NECAFS resources that were made available throughout the previous year. The evaluation was designed to allow NECAFS staff to understand if and how both impacted the respondents' regional food safety work. Regarding the Annual Conference and Meeting, we asked specifically if attendees learned something or met someone new and, if so, what they learned and if this new knowledge or new relationship would change their approach to FSMA and food safety in general. Further, the evaluation asked what key food safety challenges individuals saw in our region and/or in their state. Regarding the resources made available by NECAFS throughout the year, respondents were asked if resources helped improve their ability to provide food safety training, education and/or outreach and, if so, how. Finally, attendees rated NECAFS in the areas of regional communication, building regional capacity, competence, and collaboration while developing and delivering educational programs.

NECAFS Annual Conference and Meeting Impact Results

When asked, "Did you learn something new?" 33 (97%) respondents answered "Yes" (Figure 1). Answers to the follow-up evaluation question "If so, what did you learn?" (Figure 2) resulted in broad themes among attendees. Two dominate themes emerged:

- individual needs for produce safety community members, and
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- different collaborative opportunities.

Many attendees included multiple responses that corresponded with several themes, indicating that they learned more than one thing from attending the Annual Conference and Meeting.

First, respondents generally described learning more about risk assessment and worker training, both topics that were featured during the produce safety workgroup meeting. Additionally, that it is difficult to follow the preventive controls (PC) regulation, there is a need for more communication from the PC workgroup, and that there is a need to increase awareness to processors.

Second, responses explained that they learned about existing resources with some listing specific resources that cover the topic of dropped produce and risk assessment. Importantly, one respondent described that they “

“ that they “ assessment decision making “ “ and that they “ “ and that the approach of modeling risk “ Another attendee stated that they “ This is noteworthy because is 2020 the group identified the need to share existing research in an approachable way to increase fundamental knowledge and inform on-farm decision making. NECAFS successfully secured Food Safety Outreach Program funding to complete this work and hosted this produce safety workgroup meeting on risk assessment and dropped produce as an activity under that award.

Answers to the evaluation question “How will this new knowledge change your approach to FSMA and food safety in general?” (Figure 3) resulted in: taking a new approach in education or evaluation.

Some comments reported that the information helped to refine their understanding and that it “i

presentations or topic discussed during the Annual Meeting while worker training issues seen on farms was covered extensively during this meeting with an inspector panel and break out group discussions. On the topic of cleaning and sanitizing, respondents cited "

Subthemes also emerged, including:

- compliance and implementation by growers and processors for various reasons,
- awareness,
- hard-to-reach audiences, and
- not enough collaboration.

Respondents were particularly concerned with challenges surrounding the confidence of some growers explaining that some have trouble keeping up or know they are in compliance.

While there are a

Moving forward, NECAFS plans to host its next Annual Conference and Meeting in-person. Some elements from virtual programming were well received by attendees and will be incorporated into the in-person meeting, including breakout groups and focused topic specific discussion.