

Food Safety Conference

Summary: Interactive Collaborative Planning Process

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Summary

More than 600 people attended the national conference on food safety education, representing 48 U.S. states and educators from all over the world. By entering responses to an online Planning Tool at kiosks throughout the conference center, attendees voiced their thoughts regarding their goals, food safety education needs, and provided information on their budgets and organizations.

On the last day of the conference, this data – along with the knowledge and experiences gleaned from the conference itself – were used to create an Interactive Collaborative Planning Process. Everyone’s knowledge, experience, and best ideas were brought to the fore as regional teams gathered to put theory into action – to think globally and act locally.

From the information gathered, participants drew knowledge about overall objectives, target audiences, education gaps, and budget parameters.

As teams, they then merged the information with knowledge drawn from conference sessions to identify actions they could take.

This document summarizes information from the Planning Tool and provides a list of some of the initiatives suggested during the regional teams’ brainstorming.

I. Description and Overview of the Process

a. Purpose

The Interactive Collaborative Planning Process was created to provide an opportunity for participants of the conference to immediately put into action new ideas and to support the theme of the conference – *Thinking Globally–Working Locally*. The process was designed to strengthen the conference experience and promote collaborative action at the regional level.

b. Creating the Planning Tool

The online web-based Planning Tool was created through the involvement of the Conference Planning Committee and the feedback of many food safety educators and administrators from around the country. The questions were developed to collect data that would be useful in the development of future food safety products and services, as well as helping to improve the performance and quality of current practices. Questions were developed as “forced choice” priorities and “open response” text formats to maximize the usefulness and coherence of the resulting data.

The Planning Tool contained the following questions:

- Please rank your top 5 food safety education priorities for the next year.
- Rank your top 3 primary target audiences.
- Which 5 tools or resources would best help you accomplish your food safety education goals?
- Rank the top 5 sources you most often use to obtain food safety education information, tools, and resources.
- Rank the 3 most significant gaps in food safety education materials or research.
- How can we best continue communication among food safety educators after this conference ends?
- Is your organization a member of a food safety partnership whose structure includes members from industry, academia, government, and consumer organizations?
- What is the name and contact information for one partnership?
- At what level is the partnership?
- How much of your professional time is spent developing and conducting food safety education programs?
- What is your organization's average annual budget for food safety education programs? (Please include external funding.)
- What is your professional affiliation?
- Please indicate the state or country where you work.

c. Collecting the Data

The tool was available online during the conference and was heavily publicized to encourage participation. Through the use of incentives and regular reminders, 82 percent of the attending participants completed the tool before the end of the third day. Attendees could complete the tool through the use of kiosks available at the conference facility or through their own computers and Internet connections.

d. Summarizing and Presenting the Data

Once the data were collected at the conference, the Conference Planning Committee analyzed the information to establish important highlights and extract whatever key priorities were suggested by the responses. The summary of the data was presented to the entire plenary session in the Collaborative Planning segment on the final day of the conference.

A summary of the data is included in this document and will also be included with the published Conference Proceedings.

e. Regional Discussions

For the final regional planning session, attendees were seated at tables by region so that new relationships could be established and potential actions and initiatives could be discussed in a regional context.

Once the data had been presented, attendees were led through a series of discussions by volunteer facilitators who had been briefed and trained by the Conference Planning

Committee. The facilitators were responsible for capturing key themes and contacts that emerged from the discussions. The facilitators asked the following questions to initiate and focus the conversations:

- **Thinking Globally** – “As you reflect on the conference, where do you think we, as a food safety community, need to focus? What should be our to-do list?”
- **Working Locally** – “What is a high-impact initiative on which you can collaborate regionally?”

f. Reporting of Regional Discussions

At the conclusion of these regional conversations and planning session, selected groups reported their results and proposed action plans to the entire conference as examples of the work that had been done. The results of regional conversations were captured and are summarized in this document and will be including in the published Conference Proceedings.

II. Results of the Data Collection

The Planning Tool collected 511 responses during the course of the conference (82 percent of conference participants). The Planning Tool yielded the following results:

a. Significant Demographics

i. Professional Affiliations

- 23.7% work with a Federal Agency
- 23.3% work with a University Extension Service
- 12.4% work with local or State health departments (6.4% local, 6% State)
- 8.5% work with a College or University
- 7.8% work with the Food Industry

ii. Time Allocated

Respondents were asked to designate an approximate percentage of their work hours dedicated to food safety education.

- Over 30% spend less than 25% of their time on food safety education.
- Approximately 25% spend from 25-50% of their time on food safety education.
- Approximately 15% spend 50-75% of their time on food safety education.
- Approximately 15% spend 75-100% of their time on food safety education.

iii. Size of Annual Food Safety Budgets

Respondents were asked to estimate the total annual budget of their organization allocated to food safety education.

- Approximately 40% have annual food safety education budgets of over \$25,000.
- Over 20% have an annual food safety budget of less than \$5,000.
- Slightly over 10% have annual food safety budgets of over \$1 million (\$1,000,000).

Of those with budgets over \$1 million, 65% are Federal agencies, 12% are university extension, 12% are other State and local agencies, about 4% are food service industry related, and about 2% are health care establishments.

iv. Geographical Representation

Respondents represented 48 U.S. states and educators from all over the world. Foreign representation included: Australia, Argentina, Bermuda, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Columbia, Ecuador, Guam, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Puerto Rico, and the United Kingdom (and Wales).

v. Food Safety Partnerships

Sixty-five percent of conference attendees are members of food safety partnerships. These partnerships are formed under Federal, national, or State auspices and include members from industry, academia, government, and consumer organizations. A significant number of these partnerships – 38% – are organized at the State level.

b. Sources of Food Safety Information and Resources

The respondents look primarily to the Federal agencies (USDA/FSIS, FDA, and the CDC) as sources to obtain food safety education information, tools, and resources. Many respondents cited the Cooperative Extension Service as their primary source.

The Internet has become a major vehicle for food safety information according to the respondents. Many web sites and other sources of information were identified by respondents, particularly for specific material and information requirements. There is extensive use of the *www.foodsafety.gov* Web site.

c. Food Safety Education Priorities

One of the most important questions posed by the planning tool, asked about the respondents' greatest food safety education priorities for the coming year. Among all respondents:

- The highest priority among respondents overall was that of training food service workers and managers. Over 42% of all respondents selected this as their first or second highest priority.
- The next highest priority was that of promoting hand washing.
- Educating children, ranked third.
- The fourth highest priority for the respondents as a group was promoting the principles of Fight BAC!®.

- Many respondents also indicated that educating the public about specific pathogens and evaluating existing food safety education programs were high priorities.
- For the subset of respondents who work for the food industry, their highest priority by far was the food safety education of culturally diverse audiences. Approximately 64% of industry representatives selected this as their highest priority. Other goals mirrored those of the group as a whole.
- For those representing Federal agencies, the most significant priority was addressing food biosecurity. Almost 40% of Federal agency respondents selected this priority as their first or second highest priority.
- Several priorities emerged as particularly high priorities in individual regions. For example, respondents from the Northwest region selected the priority of educating higher risk populations as one the most important in the coming year. Respondents from the Western region indicated that increasing food science literacy was a very high priority – higher than that suggested by those from other regions and the respondents as a whole.

d. Target Audience for Food Safety Education

Once again the data showed food service workers as the highest priority target audience for the coming year. Over 52% of respondents indicated that food service workers were their first or second highest priority target audience.

Other target audiences identified included the general public, educating children, educating the school community, educating parents of young children, and educating seniors – in that order.

Those in the Northwest region also identified public health officials as a principal target audience. While those in the North Central Region added the target group of caregivers to their highest priority list.

e. Tools and Resources

Respondents were asked to identify those tools and resources that would be most helpful to them in their work.

The most important tool according to respondents is print publications for consumers. This is followed by a desire for materials and programs on video and materials on CD-ROM. Many respondents are looking for web-based materials that can be downloaded through the Internet. And, of course, many respondents are looking for food safety education materials designed for food service workers.

f. Material and Research Gaps

Respondents were asked to identify the gaps in food safety education materials, material availability, and food safety research.

- Respondents overall indicated that that biggest gap was in food safety education materials in languages other than English. About 35% of all respondents identified this as their first or second highest priority. Some of the language gaps identified: Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, and Navaho.

- Approximately 37% of respondents identified low literacy materials as their first or second highest priority gap.
- Other gaps included the lack of evaluation tools for food safety education programs and the lack of sufficient consumer behavior research findings. Respondents also suggested more timely release of foodborne illness data.

g. Continued Communication

When respondents were asked how they would suggest the food safety community stay connected and in communication after the conference was over, a variety of responses were received.

Most respondents suggested the use of focused listservs and E-mail newsletters. Other suggestions included regularly scheduled “meet me” conference calls, regular state and national conferences, the use of web-site forums, as well as creating special sessions for food safety educators at professional meetings.

III. Summary of Interactive Collaborative Planning Process

On the last day of the conference, more than 500 attendees participating in the final session and planning process. Conference participants were grouped with other attendees from the same geographical region to create teams and were joined by a volunteer facilitator.

a. “Thinking Globally”

The regional discussion began with the question of what the food safety community, thinking globally as a whole, should be working on in 2003. These conversations were wide ranging and covered many more topics than can be summarized adequately here. The conclusion of many of these conversations, however, led to the following themes, which emerged across regions.

- Develop more effective mass media communication strategies to promote food safety.
- Increase focus on educating children through the school curriculum, their parents, and teachers.
- Create more aggressive standards for food safety certification and procedures.
- Increase focus on training food service workers and supermarket handlers.
- Build greater emphasis on educating culturally diverse and low literacy groups.
- Develop more effective and user-friendly evaluation of food safety education – find out what really works to change behavior.
- Support much greater national and, particularly, international collaboration and coordination.

Several themes emerged strongly in the regional conversations that did not show as prominently in the Planning Tool data. The consensus from the regional teams revealed an emphasis on developing more effective mass media communication strategies – a concept not highlighted in the Planning Tool data. Another example was the group’s

strong emphasis on developing much greater collaboration and coordination across regions.

b. “Working Locally”

For the second half of the Interactive Planning Process, facilitators led the regional teams to discuss how they might “work locally” with specific initiatives would most benefit from regional collaboration. These conversations among the regional teams produced outcomes that ranged from simply exploring ideas to developing action plans and time lines for implementation of proposed initiatives.

Most suggested regional collaboration initiatives fell into one or more of the following categories:

- Creating more effective and formal regional partnerships to share resources and information.
- Collaboration on mass media promotional ideas.
- Opportunities for industry, supermarket, and government collaboration on specific educational initiatives.
- Customizing promotional and educational approaches to regional audiences.

IV. Summary of Suggested Regional Initiatives

The following represents a summary of the action outcomes suggested by the regional teams. These initiatives were developed in response to the question: “What is a high-impact initiative on which you can collaborate regionally?” The suggested initiatives are organized by region.

a. Southeast Region

Suggested Initiatives:

- Develop a collaborative, regional hand washing campaign using materials that are culturally and age appropriate with strong attention to innovative design.
- Institute a campaign to increase food safety awareness/messages on television cooking shows and media outlets.
- Food safety educators begin work with restaurants/fast food/supermarkets to coordinate with vendors and increase food safety messages on take-out packaging using existing and new educational materials.
- Create enhanced coordination and interaction between Florida and Alabama extension specialists on specific project initiatives. Communication network will be established with each member by E-mail.
- Create high-impact food safety education program in elementary schools with strong focus on kindergarten.
- Work with local supermarkets and grocery stores to provide a disposable thermometer with packaged meat and poultry products. Include enhanced video training for store employees.

- Develop more complete database of existing food safety education materials available through web and catalogs.

b. Mid-Atlantic Region

Suggested Initiatives:

- Strengthen local coordination through regular regional meetings and enhanced electronic communication, including listservs/Internet/Alert System.
- Work with local media (radio) and local health departments to do a “food safety minute” in partnership with local sponsor (e.g., Giant Food, McDonald’s, local restaurants, etc.).
- Develop a video for PTA (parent and teacher association) regional meetings. Schedule presentations for the first meeting of the year. Build local capacity by enhanced “train the trainer” programs for school presenters.
- Identify the main health communication need of the regional area and focus intense efforts on that issue. Examples include seafood and wild game in the local region. Create symbols (such as irradiation symbol) that will help in the communication effort. Identify specific audiences and communication channels. Tie in efforts to state and national professional associates to open the dialogue. Have annual regional food safety meetings to exchange information and other resources. Gaps will be identified so that education efforts do not miss anyone. Identify critical audiences that need to be targeted (legislators, health inspectors, immigrants who are not residents, and other closed communities).
- Develop communication effort focused on local food safety managers. Emphasize customer impact of proper handling and specific local requirements. Include public service announcements (PSA’s) to drive the message home.
- Build school-based education initiative. Include a Sesame Street-style sing-a-long and youngsters becoming “ambassadors” for proper hand washing. Use PSA’s. Begin with pilot study with a few schools – target parents – “Did your child tell you...?”
- Initiate a regional conference to focus on culturally diverse audiences. The conference will lead to a campaign to reach managers and establishment owners with specific guidelines and recommendations.

c. Northeast Region

Suggested Initiatives:

- Pro-active use of existing major meetings, such as the regional food safety meeting of the Northeast Food and Drug Officials Association in May 2003, to encourage regional planning and coordination. Initiate a strategy to create an inspector certification program.
- Work through regional grocery chain to provide shopper education. Involve Federal government partnering with the Ad Council to get Fight BAC!® oven mitts, aprons, etc., in popular stores, e.g., Wal-Mart. Collaboration through the Food Safety Training and Education Alliance Web site: www.fstea.org.

d. Midwest Region

Suggested Initiatives:

- Develop a strategy to provide greater credibility, accuracy, and accessibility to food safety education materials. Selected committee members will serve as reviewers of new materials.
- Develop programs and support systems to increase monitoring of sanitarians.
- Develop and promote a national single source for immediate food safety information.
- Develop State-level coordination to address and manage potential turf issues, minimize duplication of efforts, and keep people informed of available resources.
- Establish a regional food safety conference.

e. Rocky Mountain Region

Suggested Initiative:

- Build strengthened coordination through the Rocky Mountain Food Safety annual conference. Increase information sharing through enhanced E-mail communication.

f. Western Region

Suggested Initiative:

- Create work group for sharing resources and information flow across FDA, USDA, Extension Service, and industry.
- Focus on creating innovative programming for seniors in Los Angeles County, including coordination of Fight BAC!® activities.
- Create a food safety “media advisory committee” to better understand and utilize the media in coordinated regional strategy.
- Expand Fight BAC!® messages to include Choose Food for Safety. Annually award a nationally known chef with a multi-organization funded award (e.g., FDA, USDA, American Dietetic Association, National Restaurant Association, etc.). Give award at a chef’s event, followed by continuing publicity and press releases. At the local level, contact specific cooking shows and other local initiatives (e.g., county fair, Made in Hawaii Festival, etc.) to incorporate food safety practices.

g. Southwest Region

Suggested Initiatives:

- Work with local legislature and city council to support food safety in schools and local restaurants. Include Fight BAC!® bandages and basket of hand washing supplies for school administration.
- Develop regional (Texas) collaboration venues and conferences on regular basis.
- Develop a coordinated “source” for all food safety training resources statewide.
- Work with Department of Health to establish “training schedule” listing all certification programs on a local and state basis.
- Develop coordinated strategy to teach food safety in childcare centers.

h. International

Suggested Initiative:

- Develop a listserv for enhanced international coordination and resource sharing. Integrate with current web-based organizations. Report on international education initiatives and share web-based materials.