



North Carolina Food Safety and Defense Task Force

Established 2003

December 30, 2010

2010 Report to the Office of the Governor

Committee Reports

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee applied for and received a five-year grant totaling \$47,260 (\$9452/yr.) from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Division of Federal-State Relations to fund Task Force meetings and implement an annual conference.

The Executive Committee strategically planned for 2010-2011 to ensure that fiscal year initiatives will support the duties as listed in Executive Order Number 38. To better meet the initiatives discussed, the Executive Committee approved the development of a website, an annual conference, and three new committees: Conference Planning, Outreach and Communication, and Education and Training.

The Executive Committee prepared a letter of support for NCDENR's proposal to adopt the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's 2009 Food Code by reference with subsequent amendments as North Carolina's retail food safety rules. Adoption of the Food Code will strengthen North Carolina's retail food safety laws and promote consistency with the national integrated food safety system.

In early December, the N.C. Food Safety and Defense Task Force was represented on a panel discussion during a live national webcast sponsored by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Division of Federal-State Relations. The webcast was designed to showcase states with successful task forces with the intent of promoting the task force model as an integral component of the national integrated food safety system.

The Executive Committee developed and approved several new items designed to better communicate the prevention, preparation, response, and recovery efforts of the Task Force to N.C. stakeholders, including industry, regulatory agencies, academia, and citizens: a Task Force logo and letterhead, a Task Force fact sheet and FAQs document, and a media policy.

Conference Planning Committee

The First annual N.C. Food Safety and Defense Task Force conference is scheduled for May 25-26, 2010, at the Sheraton Imperial, 4700 Emperor Blvd., Durham, NC. Funding for the conference is provided by a grant from the Division of Federal-State Relations, USFDA and registration fees. Joseph Reardon, Director of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Division of Federal-State Relations will be the keynote speaker. Governor Perdue has been invited to welcome our guests.

The purpose of the 2011 NC Food Safety and Defense Task Force conference is to strengthen the multi-disciplinary collaboration between local, state, and federal partners that is necessary to effectively address the ongoing challenges that face our food protection system.

The conference will aim to:

- highlight the benefits of the Task Force Model as an effective means to achieve food protection both statewide and within the national integrated food safety system;
- promote the formation of new state Task Forces by providing examples of successful Task Force structures and organization; and
- capitalize on the synergy created by the removal of agency and state silos and jurisdictional boundaries that prevent information-sharing and collaboration.

Laboratory Committee

During the 2010 calendar year, the Laboratory Subcommittee has reorganized and met three times. During reorganization, a new chair was selected for the committee and the goals and objectives for the year were defined. The primary goal is to identify gaps in food safety and defense within the state's laboratories and define ways to close these gaps. During this first year of reorganization, the subcommittee focused on organisms that pose a bioterrorism threat to the state through intentional contamination or release.

The NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Food & Drug Protection Division Microbiology laboratory has the expertise and equipment for large scale food testing during emergency events. The NC State Laboratory for Public Health has the facilities for testing biothreat agents at a Biosafety Level 3. The subcommittee has made strides in developing procedures and policies that would allow each agency to assist and excel during an emergency event in their given area of expertise.

In addition to developing new procedures, the subcommittee has developed a community within the Electronic Laboratory Exchange Network to share training opportunities, contact information, and capabilities. This information sharing helps bridge any gaps between our laboratories.

Recall Enhancement Committee

The Recall Subcommittee met quarterly to discuss current topics in food recalls. The subcommittee, in collaboration with the Education Committee, provided a workshop on recall plan development and crisis management for small and medium-sized businesses in January 2010. A similar seminar is being developed for January 2011.

In April 2010, the Recall Subcommittee reevaluated its two-year strategic plan and identified target goals for 2010-11. The Subcommittee continues to make steady progress towards these goals. Among the goals are to develop a web presence for the task force, utilize working relationships with local health departments to improve recall effectiveness, and work with industry to more quickly identify consumers with recalled products. The subcommittee will also receive a tutorial on interagency use of the North Carolina Food Defense Event Management tool in the near future.

Communications and Outreach Committee

The Task Force is also creating a website to facilitate communications and outreach among Task Force participants and between the Task Force and the wider citizenry of North Carolina, to make our tools, trainings, and educational materials available to a wider audience. The two website domains that have been secured are:

ncfoodsafetytaskforce.org
foodsafetytaskforce.nc.gov

The website is being developed and will be hosted by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Appendix 1

Talking Points

One activity completed by the Task Force in 2010 was to develop talking points about the Task Force which can be used or shared as needed. The talking points are included in toto as follows:

What is the N.C. Food Safety and Defense Task Force?

The Task Force is a multi-agency, multi-stakeholder partnership designed to improve the protection of the food supply in North Carolina. The Task Force is comprised of members with relevant expertise drawn from the ranks of academia, private industry, state and local government agencies, the law enforcement community, and technical professionals. The Task Force is chaired jointly by the Commissioner of Agriculture, the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services through their various designees.

How is the Task Force Organized?

The Task Force was re-established through 2013 by Executive Order Number 38, signed by Governor Beverly Perdue in late 2009. The Task Force is chaired jointly by the Commissioner of Agriculture, the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services through their various designees. The Task Force as a whole meets bi-monthly for a total of six times annually, and committees have been established that meet as needed to complete the work requested by the body as a whole. Much of the work of the Task Force is accomplished through the efforts of the committees.

What is the Purpose of the N.C. Food Safety and Defense Task Force?

The duties of the Task Force, as specified within Executive Order Number 38, are as follows:

- Partner with state and federal agencies to conduct focused studies of the vulnerability of the State's food system to criminal and terrorist acts, and make recommendations regarding the following issues:
 - improving safety and security of the food supply system,
 - reducing terrorism threat measures,
 - improving food safety and defense mitigation and response plans, and
 - implementing or coordinating training for key stakeholders in the State's food supply system.

- Recommend legislation needed to improve the ability of State departments and agencies to protect the safety and defense of the State's food supply and the agricultural industry base, including legislation to protect sensitive and proprietary information of the State's food supply system, safety and defense vulnerability information, and defense plans that, if compromised, would

heighten the exposure of the State's food supply system to criminal or terrorist acts.

- Recommend budget, staffing, and resource adjustments necessary to improve the capability of State departments and agencies to protect the safety and defense of the State's food supply system and agricultural industrial base.
- Prepare an annual report no later than the 15th of December each year that includes any recommendations or proposals for changes in laws, rules, and programs that the Task Force determines to be appropriate to enhance food safety and defense in the State.

How is the Task Force Funded?

Funding is supplied by a renewable grant supplied by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (\$10,000) and by the State Office of Budget and Management (if needed).

Why is the N.C. Food Safety and Defense Task Force beneficial to North Carolina?

The Task Force brings together all of the stakeholders responsible for protecting the food supply chain within our state, including local, state, and federal agencies, industry, and academia. It provides the catalyst for information sharing and collaboration by helping to remove “agency silos.” Regular meetings allow members to interact within a structured setting designed to cultivate improvements in the food safety system, such as addressing vulnerabilities, developing emergency response plans, and building the partnerships necessary for cohesive, effective collaboration.

What has the Task Force accomplished?

- The Task Force was the key ingredient in North Carolina’s successful response to the Castleberry’s food product recall in 2007, an event that served as a “benchmark” for our state’s ability to respond to a large-scale food emergency event. The Castleberry recall had all of the ingredients to be a “perfect storm” that could unleash untold consequences on North Carolina’s citizens and health care system—a lethal pathogen (*Clostridium botulinum*), a large variety of food products, a shelf stable vehicle (cans), and wide public trust in the brand. North Carolina used all of the resources of the Task Force and effectively prevented approximately 30,000 cans of recalled products from being served, many of which were going to be served to highly susceptible populations. The key factor in our successful response was the Task Force. By learning about the roles of other agencies and establishing the appropriate connections prior to the Castleberry recall, North Carolina’s food protection agencies were able to implement both an efficient and effective multi-agency response. Since this incident the Task Force has continued to partner with agency members in response to other food related recalls.

- Key emergency response plans were developed and incorporated into the State Emergency Response Plan as hazard-specific appendices. The plans are the Food Emergency Response Plan, the Livestock Emergency Response Plan, and the Emergency Response Plan for Crops and Produce.
- The North Carolina Fresh Produce Task Force was created to address the growing number of food outbreaks originating from contamination of leafy greens and other produce at the farm or en route to distribution and retail centers. The Fresh Produce Task Force has several subcommittees tasked with developing solutions for the prevention of contamination, improved traceability, and the education of farmers.
- Training and exercises on pertinent topics, such as emergency response plans, crisis communication, and specific pathogens and threats, have been periodically coordinated for the Task Force members.

What does the Task Force expect to accomplish in the upcoming year?

In the upcoming year, the Task Force expects the committees to launch several new initiatives, including a website, an inter-state conference, and a Task Force-wide training series. The Executive Committee is committed to promoting the use of the Task Force model as an effective method in which to benefit from the synergy created by multi-stakeholder collaboration. We believe that a successful Task Force is more than the sum of its parts. To that end, the Task Force will continue to improve upon its methodology within North Carolina and seek inter-state partnerships as well. To continue to be effective in the years to come, we expect the committees to evolve and expand its mission to meet the challenges of the changing global food system, from marketplace demand to emerging threats.