ABOUT THE RFSC

1. Tell us about the RFSC.

The idea for the consortium began at an Institute of Food technologists Seminar in 2004. Several Industry and Academic speakers commented on the lack of networking across disciplines (academic, industry, and regulatory). After that Dr. Brian Nummer proposed a Round table Conference to the USDA CSREES. It was funded and occurred in November 2006. The round table had approximately 35 participants. It was also the first time AFDO, NEHA, and IAFP were invited to participate as stakeholders. The results of that round table provided the information needed to seek a larger USDA CSREES grant.

In 2007, a larger USDA CSREES grant was awarded. It awarded funds to five academic programs together with AFDO, NEHA and IAFP. Details of the objectives and goals are listed below.

2. What do you hope to accomplish?

I would hope that this grant would help to facilitate the bringing together of all retail food safety stakeholders. While there are many organizations, programs, and websites that bring important retail food safety issues to the forefront, no single group brings EVERYBODY together. It is our hope that the RFSC can accomplish this important goal.

The development of the RFSC website over the last 18 months should prove to be a significant addition to the toolbox for people working in the field of retail food protection, but in addition, it has been a good collaborative effort among the various groups represented in this consortium to agree on a very simple structure that enables many people to contribute resources to something that is important to everyone that puts food in their mouth or on their family’s plates.

The working relationship among the various people representing NEHA, AFDO and IAFP along with Extension should be as valuable as the “tangible” deliverables. Speaking for myself, I was familiar with NEHA and AFDO from serving for years with CFP, but going to a NEHA or AFDO meeting was new to me and makes me realize that there will many good things that can come from this project. I have long been a proponent of partnering Extension and Health at the county level for food safety education, but that is not a universal model that is 100% adaptable (if there is such a thing). The last 18 months has also seen many states and counties facing tough economic times for the near term at least. The RFSC website provides a tool to simplify developing or improving food safety educational materials without being expensive.

3. What are your major objectives?

- Roundtables: Each year the Consortium will convene a one-day roundtable at the annual meetings of one of the professional organizations: National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) in 2008; Association for Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) in 2009; and International Association for Food Protection (IAFP) in 2010.

- Identify and scientifically validate retail food safety practices: To support food safety professionals, “proven” practices in retail food safety will be identified and validated. This would for greater consistency and less arbitrary recommendations. Proven practices will be solicited
from Consortium members. All practices will be scientifically reviewed and modified, if necessary, to create a repository of “proven” practices.

- Support the development of integrated retail food safety resources: This objective focuses on defining and refining the tools food safety professionals have readily available to them. Assess needs from Health Professionals. Collect resources and disseminate.

- Assist stakeholders set priorities and allocate resources in retail food safety: Collect, prioritize, and communicate retail food safety research and outreach priorities.

4. What do you see as the most exciting accomplishment of the consortium so far (Spring 2009)?

To date the NEHA round table information together with the Health Professionals survey is being compiled for publication. This puts scientific numbers on the data that many of us knew with regard to training and education needs. The data is guiding our efforts to collect and disseminate resources via our main website (retailfoodsafty.org) and connected websites that provide editable resources (photos, documents, presentations, etc.).

In addition, I believe that we have made great progress in networking the different stakeholders together (academics, IAFP, AFDO, and NEHA). Several joint activities have arisen outside of the grant round tables and some individuals have joined the other associations.

5. Can you tell us why and how you administered the survey at the 2008 NEHA Annual Conference?

The RFSC wanted to improve resources available to Environmental Health Specialists (EHSs) who work with the retail food service industry. Therefore, the RFSC, in partnership with NEHA, prepared an online survey that was administered to NEHA members. An on-line survey was viewed as the best way to reach as many EHSs as possible.

Please click [http://extension.usu.edu/rfsc/files/uploads/RFSC%20--%20AFDO%20presentation.ppt](http://extension.usu.edu/rfsc/files/uploads/RFSC%20--%20AFDO%20presentation.ppt) for the entire Power Point presentation. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact:

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6. Who are the consortium participants?

The main participants are academics from Utah State University, Rutgers University, University of Arkansas, Clemson University, and Purdue University. Regulators are represented by participants from the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) and National Environmental Health Association (NEHA). Industry is represented by participants from the International Association for Food Protection (IAFP). Besides membership via organizations, there are members that participate directly.
7. What is the role of academia?

Certainly academia is an important stakeholder relative to retail food safety issues. In many cases, they help to provide a source and resource for science-based information. They also help to facilitate and discuss difficult issues between other stakeholders – such as the food industry and regulatory agencies. In this grant, we have involved some of the best academicians in the country that have experience and expertise relative to retail food safety. It is our hope that the RFSC can help grow interest amount more of our colleges to enhance this stakeholder group presence.

8. What is the role of Extension?

The Cooperative Extension Service is the non-credit educational component of the Land-Grant University system and primarily focuses on improving people’s lives through education focused on life-long learning, starting with 4-H for youth through elder programs. The Cooperative part comes from an organizational history of working at the city/county, state and federal levels. Most states have programs delivered to families and consumers on food safety, but not all that many have a clear focus on retail food safety, and there are only a small number of University Extension Specialists that have retail food safety as main components of their individual plans of work. Five of these specialists from the five universities of the RFSC came together with funding from USDA, with a plan to develop the relationship with AFDO and NEHA that will make the education delivery at the retail level easier and more effective.

9. What is the role of industry?

The food industry always needs a lot of the food safety information that will be available through the RFSC website at www.retailfoodsafty.org. Food safety training is a big need within the industry and the RFSC will be a resource of best training tools and tips to help industry trainers do a better job. The food industry also is a wealth of food safety information and it is the hope of the RFSC that many industry professionals will release their information for access through the RFSC website.

**RFSC RESOURCES**

10. How will the consortium resources help local, state and federal regulators?

From what we learned from the listening sessions at the 2008 NEHA meeting in Arizona and validated by the follow-up survey sent out by NEHA, there are several avenues that the “partnership” can pursue in order to make the educational process easier. For instance, we have learned that the local sanitarians or environmental health specialists are the ones doing the bulk of the “day in / day out” contact with the retail industry and that have educatable moments or opportunities that might increase food safety knowledge and awareness. These same people are telling us that they would like to have searchable internet access to photos, fact sheets, backgrounders, etc that they can put their logo on and make relevant to their clientele. This is a major component of what the RFSC is proposing for the website at www.retailfoodsafty.org.

Many State and local regulator offices do not have the resources and know where to go to get additional food safety information outside of what they deal with day-to-day. The RFSC website will be a goldmine of information that is categorized to be user-friendly and assist regulators in getting more up to the date information on issues they come across or have to deal with. As a self education tool, the website will prove invaluable for those that want to “surf the net” in a safe, structured environment that gets to the point in minimal time.
11. Tell us about the RFSC website resources.

Our website of resources is www.retailfoodsafty.org. Development of a comprehensive website is an important tool in moving the RFSC forward. The primary goal is to provide as much information as we possibly can relative to ALL of the stakeholders needs for retail food safety information and training materials.

As you will see, the website provides a tremendous resource that otherwise does not exist. Try linking into the RFSC website and let us know what you think. While the website has just been launched and is in its infancy, we expect the information to grow significantly within the next couple of months.

12. What stakeholder groups would benefit from the website resources?

The goal here is to provide benefits to ALL stakeholders. At this point, we have identified important stakeholders to include regulators, educators/academicians, and food industry professionals that serve the retail food safety industry. Our website is not intended to be used by consumers or the general public for general food safety information, since many websites exist for that purpose.

13. Can a retailer use the website?

Yes. Having access to retail best practices through the RFSC will help all retailers and their customers by improving the industry food safety practices as a whole.

14. How is www.retailfoodsafty.org structured?

Within the website structure, there is content information and contact links to 1) national organizations that impact retail food safety, 2) state organizations for each of the 50 US states, and, 3) county information for each state. Here you will find many links to organizations around the country and specific to your locality.

From a functional standpoint, our goal is to provide science-based information that can be used to learn about topics of interest and/or can be used as part of a training program. Interested users of the website can 1) search for information (at the “resources search” area) related to specific topics, and they can also 2) submit links (at the “resources submit” area) for information related to specific topics. As information is submitted, it is reviewed by a RFSC committee to ensure that the information is credible and current.

15. What type of information can be searched through the website?

The website does a nice job of “walking you through the process.” Within the search function, you are able to search from a wide variety of searchable areas including:

1) Topics (specific retail food safety topics)
2) Audience (intended population that the information will be used)
3) Type (specific information type - fact sheet, Power Point, poster, video, etc.)
4) Origin (identifies where the information came from)
5) Language (identifies what language the information is in)

16. How can I submit data for the website?

The submit function of the website is very similar in structure to the search function. The only main difference is that the information will be evaluated and approved by a committee within the RFSC to
ensure that it is current, credible, and appropriate. When you submit information, you will have the option to provide your name and contact information, in case we have a question.

It is very important that the “world of retail food safety professionals” participate and submit information to the website. Having more information from a wide variety of stakeholders will only make the RFSC website better.

**AFDO INVOLVEMENT IN THE RFSC**

17. Why did AFDO get involved?

AFDO signed on as a participant because of our member’s expertise in working with food establishments and the value the project provides to state and local food safety programs. The 2009 AFDO conference is an excellent venue for informing and eliciting input from AFDO membership about the project.

18. What can AFDO members gain from the consortium?

The resources available through the web sit at [www.retailfoodsafety.org](http://www.retailfoodsafety.org) will enable programs to quickly find food safety communication tools which have been peer reviewed and modify them, if necessary for specific needs.

19. What is the purpose of the round table at the 2009 AFDO conference?

AFDO represents many of the state programs as well as government officials with regional and national responsibilities. These people have access to information and situations within their respective states / regions and they can serve as enablers for folks working at the local level. As an example in working with AFDO members to prepare for this round table, we have learned that every state will have a person responsible for food safety education at the state level, either by job title or assigned responsibilities. These are the people that the RFSC needs to network with in order to make the most of the resources made available and the efforts expended.

20. What would you like to see as a result of this round table?

The round table itself was an example of meeting the expectations those of us involved with the RFSC effort had when we began. Opening the doors to communication in a friendly atmosphere of sharing and caring about issues within the food industry is one of the best things that can happen and it started with the first round table at NEHA in 2008. Let’s keep it going!

21. How will the AFDO Virtual Access Membership relate to the consortium?

The AFDO Virtual Access will provide a link to the RFSC website at [www.retailfoodsafety.org](http://www.retailfoodsafety.org) and will provide information developed by AFDO for food safety inspection officers.

22. How will AFDO stay involved with the RFSC after it is developed?

The AFDO Education and Training Committee will serve as the link to the RFSC after it is developed and provide a venue for communicating state and local program needs and perspectives.