

Results of the FY19 and FY20 FSIS Surveys of Foodborne Illness Outbreak Investigation Partners – Improving Collaborative Response

William Lanier, US Public Health Service/USDA-FSIS, Office of Public Health Science, Applied Epidemiology Staff

Background

Strong state-federal partnerships are essential for effective, collaborative response to foodborne outbreaks. To inform efforts to strengthen partnerships, including encouraging partners to notify FSIS of relevant foodborne outbreaks, FSIS conducted surveys in Fiscal Years (FY) 2019 and 2020 of state and territorial partners who collaborate with FSIS to investigate foodborne outbreaks.

Survey Response Rates

Survey Year	State Participants	Territory Participants
FY19	49/50 (98%)	5/6 (83%)
FY20	48/50 (96%)	2/6 (33%)

Methods

The survey was approved by OMB (OMB control number: 0583-0175; expiration: 2/28/2022). In FY18, FSIS gathered information about which agency or entity in each state/territory would be most likely to notify FSIS of relevant outbreaks (“**outbreak notifiers**”). In FY19, FSIS surveyed the outbreak notifiers (1 person/entity per state). In FY20, FSIS surveyed both health and agriculture agencies or their equivalents (2 people/entities per state, where applicable), including the outbreak notifiers. With the exception of the common themes among free-text feedback, results are presented for “outbreak notifiers”.

Acknowledgements

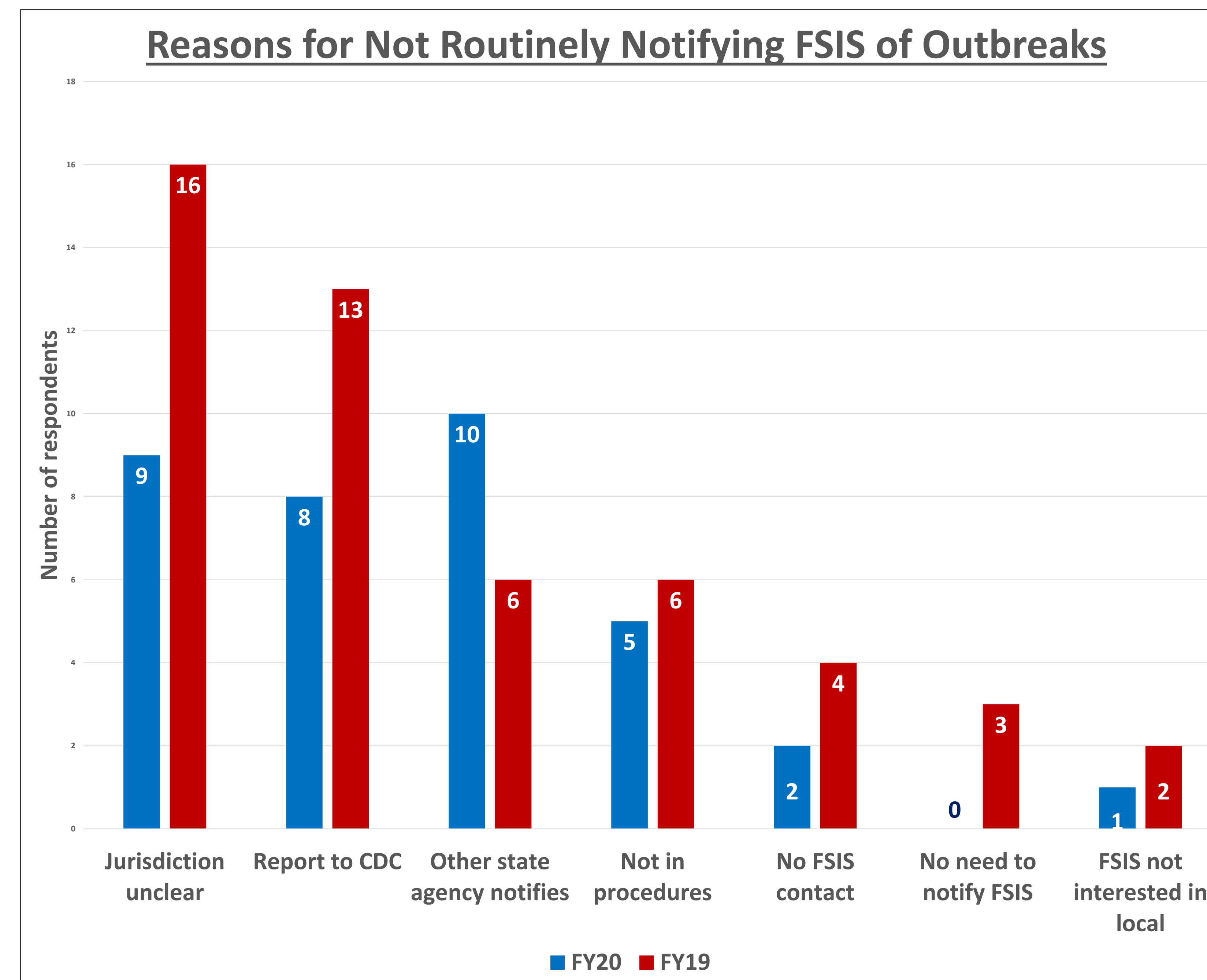
We are grateful for the state and territorial partners who completed these FSIS surveys.

Results

Frequency of Notifying FSIS of Outbreaks

Survey Year	Routinely* Notify – States	Routinely* Notify – Territories
FY19	37/49 (76%)	2/5 (40%)
FY20	40/48 (83%)	0/2 (0%)

*“Routinely”= Always or Very Often among Always, Very Often, Sometimes, Rarely, or Never.



Common themes among free-text feedback, FY19–FY20 (all survey respondents):

- Kudos/positive feedback
- Want better communication/information-sharing
- Need to establish or clarify FSIS POCs
- Seeking clarification on state sample collection & analysis
- Desire to know what FSIS needs to take action
- Prompted to create/include FSIS in written procedures
- Desire to collaborate/not duplicate effort

FSIS in Written Outbreak Response Procedures (FY20)

28/43 (65%) respondents said FSIS is included in their agency’s written procedures for foodborne outbreaks (excluded ‘no written procedures’/‘don’t know’).

Is having FSIS in written procedures associated with notifying FSIS routinely? (FY20 only)

	FSIS in Written Procedures*	FSIS Not in Written Procedures*	Total
Routinely Notify FSIS of Outbreaks	28	8	36
Do Not Routinely Notify FSIS of Outbreaks	0	7	7
Total	28	15	43

Chi-squared value: 14.4; p-value: 0.0001

*Excluded ‘no written procedures’/‘don’t know’.

Conclusions

FSIS desires to strengthen collaboration with public health partners to improve outbreak response. Likewise, state public health partners are interested in strengthening partnerships with FSIS, as evidenced by the high survey response rate and constructive feedback. To encourage states and territories to notify FSIS of outbreaks, FSIS should clarify and communicate food jurisdiction, provide points of contact, and promote inclusion of FSIS in outbreak response procedures.

Survey Results in Action

To promote communication and collaboration with state and territorial partners during outbreak investigations, FSIS has published the following online resources:

- Template for Including FSIS in Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response Procedures (www.fsis.usda.gov/OutbreakProcedures)
- Information Helpful to FSIS During Foodborne Illness Investigations (www.fsis.usda.gov/InvestigationInfo)
- Resources for Public Health Partners: Foodborne Illness Investigation (www.fsis.usda.gov/PHPartners)