

Association of Food and Drug Officials

◆ Elliot O. Grosvenor Food Safety Award ◆

*This nomination must be submitted by **April 1** to be considered for the current year's award*

Criteria for Nominations

The Elliot O. Grosvenor Food Safety Award is given to recognize outstanding achievements made by food safety programs within State Departments of Agriculture, Natural Resource Agencies, Public Health Departments or Environmental Conservation Departments in the United States or Canada. The award will go to the program that best showcases improvement, innovation or sustained high performance within a food safety program. A food safety program could include responsibility for: food safety, food protection, and food defense or food sanitation. The applications will be made to the AFDO awards committee by the deadline.

(PLEASE TYPE)

Date of Nomination: March 30, 2022 for the year ending December 31, 2021

Program's Full Name: Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development--Rapid Response Team

Nominator: Brad Deacon

Immediate Organization: Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Agency: Office of Legal Affairs and Emergency Management

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AFDO Member: Yes

Executive Summary:

Michigan was one of the first six states in the FDA's Rapid Response Team pilot grant program. Since then, with the additional financial and technical investments leveraging state resources and talent, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) has made remarkable progress in food and feed safety, laboratory capabilities, and emergency management. Using the building blocks of MFRPS and AFRPS, MDARD has expanded capacity within the Department, invested in our partnerships with local and state health departments, and greatly improved our relationship with FDA. Two key components of this have been using the RRT program to help build skills, including leadership, and also conscientiously working to diffuse these core concepts across the entire Department. The last four years in particular have seen improvements in many areas, including training, institutionalizing the completion of after-action reports and improvement plans, development of the PEER group as field staff leaders, and coordination with our state health department laboratory to partner on Whole Genome Sequencing.

❑ **Agency Demography (Population Served, Age and Diversity)**

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) is comprised of six divisions that use a customer-driven, solution-oriented approach to cultivate and expand new economic opportunities for the food and agricultural sector; safeguard the public's food supply; inspect and enforce sound animal health practices; control and eradicate plant pests and diseases threatening the \$104.7 billion food and agriculture system; preserve the environment by which the farming community makes their living and feeds consumers; and protect consumers by enforcing laws relating to weights and measures. Michigan's food and agriculture system is a large portion of this state's workforce. Total employment resulting from this sector is approximately 805,000, which accounts for about 17 percent of the state's employment.

With a population of over 10 million people, Michigan has vibrant and densely populated urban centers, a wide range of cities and towns, vast swaths of agricultural land, and an abundance of forests and open space stretching across two magnificent peninsulas. Michigan's African American population makes up 14% of the total, and our population also includes significant numbers of Hispanic, Asian-American, Arab-American, and Native American residents, including Michigan's 12 federally recognized tribes.

❑ **Agency Resources and Budget (Staff, Facilities, Revenues)**

For the Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2022, MDARD's budget authorizes 527 full time employees. The total appropriation was \$155,560,300, with federal funds making up \$13,599,800. This represents all activities of the Department, including food and dairy; pesticides, plant pests, feed, and fertilizer; environmental stewardship programs including farmland preservation; animal health, economic development, and laboratory services, which includes consumer protection.

The FDA's grant under the Flexible Funding Model annually supports \$610,000 (\$300,000 for RRT; \$300,000 for MFRPS, and \$10,000 for the Food Safety Alliance). Our analysis of in-kind support for the core mission of the RRT shows that state resources supporting the overall mission of the RRT are more than double the federal investment. MDARD's facilities include the downtown Lansing office in Constitution Hall, two laboratories, and a regional office supporting the Bovine TB program in the northeastern Lower Peninsula. Most field staff and regional supervisors across the state work out of their homes and vehicles, and the vast majority of the state workforce has been working remotely since 2020.

❑ **Program Planning/Self Evaluation (Vision, Staff Participation)**

When Michigan started in the FDA's RRT program, we purposefully chose a decentralized model. The Department's needs analysis identified four new positions to create: an epidemiologist, a toxicologist, and food and feed policy staff to help identify risk in those areas and build rapid response capabilities in those areas. The thinking at the time was that putting these positions in multiple parts of the Department would help improve communication, planning, and response across divisional lines. The toxicologist is housed in the Department's emergency management program, and the emergency management coordinator was designated as the principal investigator on the grant and made responsible for providing over-arching coordination and direction. The food specialist and the epidemiologist are located in the Food and Dairy Division, and the feed specialist is part of the Pesticide and Plant Pest Management Division, which includes the feed program. This structure has worked well, and over time it has ensured that these and other programs are not only sharing best practices and information, but also building coordinated response plans. More recently, MDARD has worked to further diffuse these core concepts both within and external to the department. We have developed a cohort of field inspection staff from food, dairy, produce, and feed to specialize in emergency response, including damage assessments, recall effectiveness checks, and traceback/forward work. This group, the MDARD Partners for Enhanced Emergency Response (PEER Group) has also helped to develop and present Procedures for Enhancing Emergency Responses for Field Investigators training (PEER Training) for new MDARD staff and Local Health Department staff over the last several years.

❑ **Program Management (Staff Control, Community/Industry/Consumer Support)**

Michigan’s RRT was built as a decentralized model and remains so today, in year 14 of the RRT national effort. The core components of food, feed, lab, and emergency management meet monthly to plan training and exercises, review responses, and assess progress on the grant’s deliverables. The PEER group meets quarterly to share experiences, train, and develop training. Over the years, all four of the positions created at the beginning have seen turnover through promotions and job changes. The positions have largely remained with the same focus, and the efforts to expand the concepts to the PEER groups and throughout the Department have made it relatively easy to recruit and promote staff into these roles. There has also been turnover in Department leadership, including Directors, and Division Directors in the food, feed, and lab areas, as well as leaders and key supporters in the food and feed programs. Through both the Food Safety Alliance and the Food and Agriculture Protection and Defense Working Group, MDARD staff provide updates on responses and prevention efforts to the private sector industry. Two foundational management areas still in place since the beginning of the initiative include the regular meetings between MDARD and FDA, and the institutionalized coordination between MDARD and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). MDARD and the FDA Detroit and Chicago offices hold a monthly call the hour before the national RRT call to discuss outbreaks, investigations, enforcement, recalls, training, and anything else that needs to be covered. Pre-pandemic, we also held at least two in-person meetings to go into more depth on issues, and these regular interactions and coordinated training, planning, and responses have built trust and camaraderie between the organizations. From the beginning, the MDARD epidemiologist has been a shared resource with MDHHS, physically working half time in each department. While this person performs substantive epidemiological work, the position is also a liaison between the two departments. This role and the people who have filled it have done amazing work in building trust, developing awareness, and making foodborne illness investigations and response an integrated activity.

❑ **Program Implementation (Training, Compliance, Enforcement)**

Implementation of Michigan’s RRT has been built upon a multi-disciplinary framework. Initially, the personnel hired under the grant focused on risk assessments and updating old and creating new emergency plans and templates. As efforts progressed, that led to more training, including joint training with FDA staff on Epi-Ready, statistical sampling, and a wide variety of tabletop exercises. The core concepts of the RRT program, with coordination from internal assessments from MFRPS and AFRPS, have been part of a departmental improvement strategy with impacts throughout the organization. With department leadership support in using the Incident Command System to be prepared to respond to emergencies, all staff take the ICS 100, 200, 700, & 800 classes, and over a quarter of the Department has taken advanced ICS classes including 300, 400, 305, 420, and many position specific courses as well. As both staff and management see not only the organizational benefits of an organized, team-based approach to response, but also the benefits of management and leadership skills that come from ICS, there has been more interest and internal expectations in using this management tool. Relatedly, debrief sessions or “hotwashes” have become an expected part of departmental culture after significant events and activities. These have led to writing more after-action reports, and using improvement plans as part of the Department’s overall efforts to improve on quality and timeliness.

❑ **Program Outcomes (Measurable Outcomes)**

The RRT program and grant agreement comes with a number of expectations and deliverables, which the Michigan RRT routinely not only accomplishes, but exceeds. This includes maintenance and updating of emergency plans, completion of after-action reports and improvement plans after significant responses; completion of training projects; presentations at local, state, and national levels; engagement with other agencies at all levels, as well as the private sector; progress and maintenance in both MFRPS and AFRPS; assisting with developing and updating Best Practices Manual documents and the annual RRT meeting; coordinating with other states, particularly with the other six Midwestern states in the RRT program; and tracking the metrics associated with complaints, foodborne illness investigations, and other responses, including joint responses with FDA.

Goals for Improvement

The Michigan RRT is looking forward to completing Year 4 and beginning Year 5 of the current 5-year grant period, and to further institutionalizing the core concepts of prevention, early detection, and rapid response, by using debriefs and after-action reports to help understand not only what can be improved, but what went well, and why it went well. We are building an environment where this kind of review is expected and normalized, relying on the concepts of appreciative inquiry to build upon the positive things being accomplished and then to do more. Rather than focusing on what wrong, we are looking at what can be improved for the future and committing to dates and for those improvements. One area in particular where we want to do more is engaging more deeply with industry in doing this kind of root cause analysis about the sources of contamination.

❑ Issues/Challenges/Risks

One of the biggest challenges facing RRTs is staff turnover. With promotions, retirements, and in some cases, burnout, an RRT program built around one or a few individuals runs the risk of significant setback when those core people depart. Michigan RRT's successes have been built upon a decentralized approach, including multiple disciplines and divisions within the Department, but also significant engagement from field staff to the corner office. Using a concentric circle approach, if asked who is on the RRT, the answer could be everyone in the Department, and local, state, and federal partners, should the incident or issue be big enough. By engaging field inspectors, their supervisors, program management, and all the way to the Executive Office with the concepts and training of the Incident Command System, bringing everyone along about the concepts of rapid response has been a logical next step.

❑ Summary (Improvement or Innovation that Merits Award)

Major responses / activities over the last four years include:

- Responding to and resolving a 10 year sporadic salmonella outbreak at a chain restaurant
- An investigation involving Hoary Alyssum in hay intended for horses
- Follow up work from a historic outbreak that led to the discovery of listeria in Enoki mushrooms
- Multiple outbreaks and recalls in produce, hummus/tahini, frozen potatoes, and more.
- Pig ears and salmonella
- MDARD has played a key role in the State of Michigan's response to PFAS chemical contamination
- In 2020, the food program Conducted more than 10,700 inspections, follow-up inspections, consultations, and investigations, and responded to over 1,300 food safety complaints. Food safety inspectors also collected 895 food samples to be analyzed for pathogens or food safety parameters, and six hundred environmental monitoring samples were collected and analyzed by MDARD's lab.

Though the Michigan RRT has been in building and growth mode for quite a few years, some major accomplishments and notable activities over the last four years stand out.

- Development of the PEERS and PEER training. These leaders among our field staff have organized and presented both in person and virtually to expose new MDARD hires and colleagues in local health departments to core concepts including chain of custody, recalls, and traceback/forward work. The PEER Group conducted informal, field focused debriefs to identify actions items for the group. They continue to incorporate RRT concepts and leadership into everyday field activities, adding to our long-term goal of sustainability through deepening RRT culture and engagement. The group also mentored 1-2 newer field staff this year to introduce them to the workgroup and RRT concepts. The MDARD PEER Group is partially supported with RRT funding, and now includes field staff from food, dairy, produce, and feed.
- Partnership with the MDHHS Laboratory to partially support a bioinformatician to assist with Whole Genome Sequencing. This position between MDARD and MDHHS has helped bridge the gap between clinical and environmental/agricultural isolates during the identification of suspected outbreaks. In September 2020, Dr. Blankenship was able to provide phylogenetic analysis of collected flat parsley isolates and historical clinical and environmental isolates of *Listeria monocytogenes*. In addition, she provided a SNP distance matrix visual aid to assist the RRT in identifying whether additional follow up on these samples was warranted.
- Major developments in using the Incident Command System, including implementing a requirement that all Department staff take the ICS 100, 200, 700, and 800 courses, and deployment of MDARD / RRT staff to work in Incident Management Teams at temporary care hospitals as part of COVID response. We have brought in advanced ICS classes including position specific courses, and invited FDA and other states to attend.
- As part of response to COVID, MDARD deployed four lab staff to the MDHHS lab, and MDARD's Lab both made hand sanitizer and then conducted evaluations of sanitizers in the marketplace, which led to several recalls of products.
- 2019's Sampling Team Exercises. In 8 sessions around the State, staff gathered for a refresher on ICS and emergency management, then tested capabilities in sample collection, biosecurity, and marketplace surveillance. Sampling included lead in spices, fish speciation, toxicity of luster dust, and efficacy of mosquito repellent. One session also focused on preparing for an ingestion pathway exercise at one of Michigan's nuclear plants. Each of the 8 sessions had a different Incident Management Team, which provided many opportunities for staff to experience playing different roles.
- 2022's Sampling Team Exercises. Held every three years, Sampling Team provides an opportunity to collect samples from the marketplace, while also creating a venue for cross and just-in-time training, building surge capacity, and testing things like chain of custody and Incident Management Teams. The first session for 2022 is March 31 and will focus on invasive plant pests. The other sessions stretching into the summer will include food and feed sampling scenarios, as well as radiological preparedness
- Michigan hosted the 3rd meeting of the 7 Midwestern RRT states and FDA in Marquette in 2019, which included a multi-state tabletop exercise with a contaminated produce scenario. A direct outcome of that exercise was bringing together 120 representatives from multiple federal, state and local agencies for an adaptation of the produce safety exercise in February of 2020.
- MDARD's RRT participated in the Commercial Facilities Food Defense Workshop virtual tabletop exercise in October 2020 with public and private sector partners and coordinated by the FBI; a food defense and chemical facility in-person exercise also conducted by the FBI in fall of 2021; and in the Midwest RRT states and FDA virtual multi-state exercise using an intentional contamination scenario.
- Risk & Crisis Communications sessions, both in person and virtually, designed to help staff at all levels in the Department and local health departments better understand the importance and mechanics of messaging, and in how to be prepared when put on the spot by the media or public. We've held multiple sessions each of the last several years, and also provided it as an add-on session to the national RRT meeting held in Louisville, KY.

□ **Attachments**

- Testimonials (maximum of two)
- Acknowledgements
- Appendices

Nominated by: Brad Deacon

Signature: *Bradley N. Deacon*

The winner of this award will identify an individual to receive travel funds (if available and pursuant to AFDO's travel policy) to attend the annual AFDO conference held in June in order to publicly receive an official plaque of recognition and will be given time on the program agenda to comment on the award. The winner will be invited to attend the AFDO Wiley Awards Banquet during the conference.

Attendance is not mandatory for receiving the award. Return this form, a photocopy of this form (both sides) and ***please submit by April 1*** to:

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