

# Stepping Up To The Plate: MFRPS/RRT Collaboration in Pennsylvania

Kelly E. Kline, MPH; Suzanne Pyle

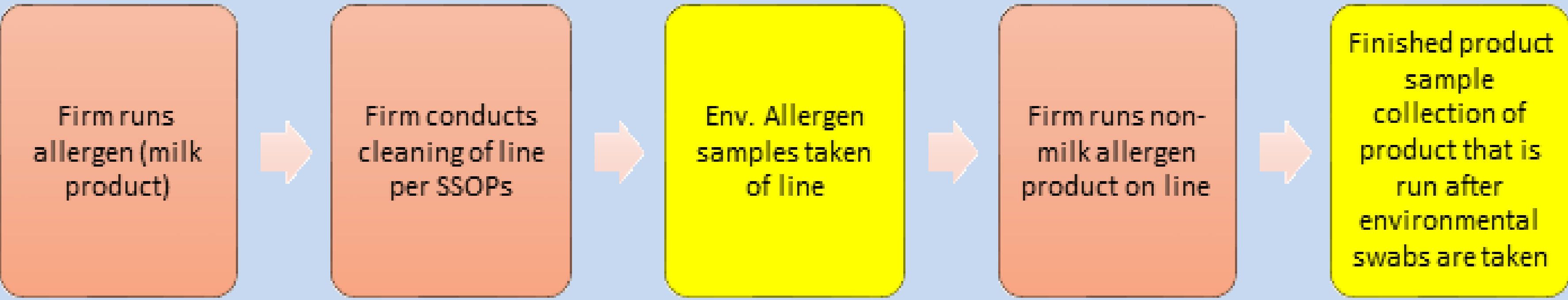
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Food Safety & Laboratory Services



## Investigation of Allergen Cross-Contamination at a Pretzel Manufacturer

During a contract inspection at a pretzel manufacturer (Berks County), a PDA inspector determined that the firm was failing to control for allergen cross-contact on a shared line. The same line was used for dairy/non-dairy products, as well as sesame/non-sesame products. Label review also revealed mislabeling for ingredients. The firm was not receptive to adjusting their process, increasing allergen controls, or re-labeling the “contains” statement on packaging in accordance with federal and state regulations.

PDA notified FDA of the findings and developed an investigation strategy that involved sampling the production line and the finished product for milk allergens. On 7/23/24, PDA conducted a site investigation and collected allergen swabs from areas with deficient sanitation and allergen cross-contact. This was PDA’s first experience collecting and testing environmental samples for milk proteins.



The environmental samples identified the presence of dairy allergens in the environment after the firm finished processing, cleaning, and sanitizing. However, finished product results were negative for dairy allergens. The firm was required to implement processing controls and correct inappropriate product labels. There was no product recall.

## For The Love of the Game: Lessons in Teamwork

- The MFRPS and RRT Programs are heavy hitters in the world of food safety. Make sure you show up for each other and play on the same team. The MFRPS Coordinator is a key member of the Core PA RRT. The RRT Coordinator participates in the Food Protection Taskforce. Both coordinators participate in the Recall Integration Partnership Project (RIPP).
- Ensure both program have fundamental skills. Basic training for staff in the Bureau of Food Safety & Laboratory Services includes basic MFRPS curriculum, and the RRT Coordinator completed FD190: Food Current Good Manufacturing Practice, Application, and Evidence Development and FD152: Food Processing and Technology. Members of the Core PA RRT, including the MFRPS Coordinator, complete required coursework under the PA RRT Training Plan.
- Each player has a specialization and independence, and each player’s action is connected to the next. Communicate and play to each other’s strengths. A single MVP won’t carry a team to victory.
- Sometimes a team member drops the ball. Communicate and evaluate what went wrong to fix the problem for the next time. Use AARs and hotwashes to evaluate what went well, what went wrong, and what you can learn for next time. Each response is a new ball game and a chance to start over.
- Public health is unpredictable and full of curveballs. Don’t be afraid to rely on each other. One person can’t play all positions, and sometimes you need a pinch hitter.



## Complaint of Cryptosporidium and STEC Associated with Unpasteurized Apple Cider

The PA RRT received a complaint alleging illnesses of STEC and Cryptosporidium in the same household. The cases reported consuming unpasteurized apple cider from a farm in Berks County. Upon initial investigation, the farm was determined to be operating an unlicensed retail store and cider press. Other products were also available for sale, including multiple acidified canned goods.

On 10/30/24, the MFRPS Coordinator accompanied field staff on site. Two samples of unopened cider (1 gallon and ½ gallon) were collected for testing. The unopened apple cider tested positive for E. coli O5:H9 and O181:H49 at PDA. Samples were negative for Cryptosporidium at CDC. The facility initiated a recall, contacting customers that had purchased apple cider.

On 11/7/24, the RRT Coordinator and field staff visited the firm to review the facility and collect water samples. Samples were tested for STEC and Cryptosporidium at PA DEP. All water samples were negative.

Additional enforcement activities were conducted by field staff and the MFRPS Coordinator. The facility was issued a retail license for prepackaged food items on 12/10/24. Canned goods previously that were misbranded and/or from unapproved sources were disposed of through means of diversion for personal use. The MFRPS Coordinator conducted a walkthrough of the proposed retail cider production area and provided owners with guidance on required sanitation procedures and physical repairs required for licensing.

