

Georgia Rapid Response Team Activities During 2024

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Cucumber Mania

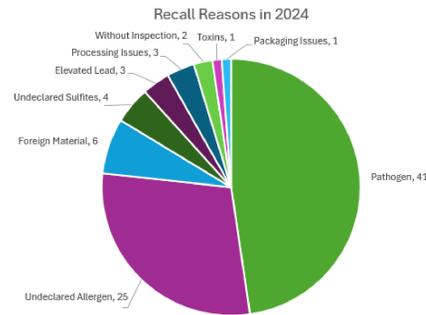
Summer 2024 seemed to be the season for cucumber outbreaks and recalls. In July, the Georgia RRT was involved in a multistate outbreak tied to Salmonella Africana and Salmonella braenderup in cucumbers. Georgia had 49 cases in this 36-state outbreak. GA RRT also conducted an STEC investigation after being alerted by another state of a positive sample. The cucumbers were sampled by Michigan RRT and traced back to Georgia. CORE Calls with federal partners were held in addition to internal GDA calls with the Produce Safety Program.



Figure 1. Cucumbers sampled from Michigan Rapid Response Team at retail traced back to a Georgia farm. Photo credit: Michigan RRT

Monitored Recalls

There were a total of 86 recalled food products from FDA and USDA sold in Georgia that Georgia RRT monitored in 2024.



Food Defense for Special Events

Towards the end of 2024, RRT began preparations for food defense trainings with partner agencies for upcoming sporting events hosted in Atlanta.
2025: College Football National Championship Game, FIFA Club World Cup, and MLB All-Star Game
2026: FIFA World Cup
2028: Super Bowl LXII

Radiological Tabletop Exercise

Members of both Georgia and South Carolina RRTs attended a Radiological Incident Tabletop Exercise (TTX) Pilot hosted by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Health Security and Sandia National Laboratories in Greenville, South Carolina in July. This exercise was discussion-based and focused on response and recovery actions following a nuclear power plant accident impacting the food and agricultural sectors in the Southeastern US. Both Georgia and South Carolina agriculture, emergency management, and forestry personnel attended. The two states have multiple nuclear reactors and have overlapping ingestion pathway zones. After the exercise, Georgia RRT featured the Radiological TTX in their quarterly newsletter. Washington RRT inquired about exercise planning after seeing the newsletter. In December, Washington RRT met with Georgia RRT virtually for TTX information sharing.



Figure 2. Members of Georgia and South Carolina Food Safety and Emergency Management Divisions during the tabletop.

GDA's 150th Anniversary

Georgia Department of Agriculture celebrated its 150th anniversary in February 2024. It is the nation's first state agriculture department.



The Georgia RRT program has been another wonderful addition to the GDA capabilities and infrastructure to facilitate more timely and effective responses during disasters and special events. The RRT grant has allowed for greater networking and resource allocation for food safety and food defense activities. Georgia has been a contributing member of the national RRT program since 2013 and looks forward to continuing to support the integrated food safety system and supporting best practices and information sharing efforts to better our state and the nation.

Hurricane Response

Hurricane season runs every year from June 1 to November 30. Georgia RRT will activate field teams and assist at the State Operations Center during a hurricane to monitor and respond to any establishment damages and food safety issues. In 2024, Tropical Storm Debby impacted southeastern Georgia with severe flooding and dam breaches in August. Just weeks later, Hurricane Helene made its approach to Georgia as a Category 2 storm affecting much of the same area as Debby. The Georgia RRT Coordinator worked at the State Operations Center during both responses and held communication calls with RRT partner agencies along with providing FDA lists of affected facilities post-storm. GDA and DPH response teams conducted assessments throughout the state in affected counties. USDA FSIS did follow-up inspections as well.

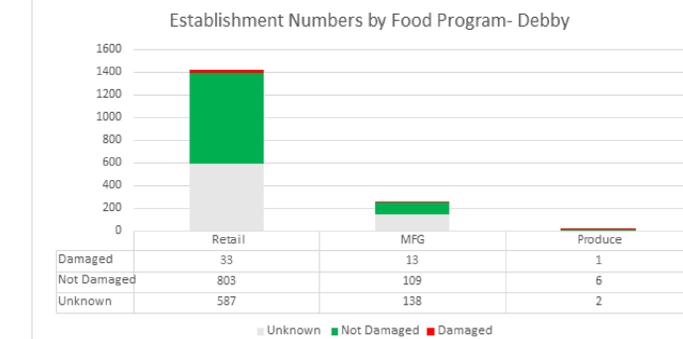


Table 1. GDA Food Safety Division establishments contacted after Tropical Storm Debby

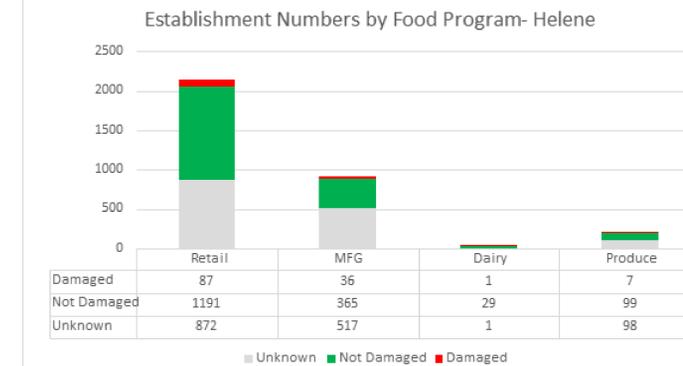


Table 2. GDA Food Safety Division establishments contacted after Hurricane Helene.

Damage Assessment forms are made through Survey123, which is an application on ArcGIS online. It is designed for all four food safety programs to be able to fill it out while either on the phone or on-site at an establishment. Tables 1 and 2 show the amount of firms noting their damage status. The industry self-reporting form was another option to assess damages after the storms. It was sent out to industry via social media, emails, and can accessed via the Department's website. RRT continues to educate industry on utilizing self-reporting methods.



Figure 3. Damage at a dairy facility in Waynesboro, Georgia impacted from Hurricane Helene shared by Georgia Milk Producers Association.



Image from <https://www.supportgeorgiafarmers.org/promotion>

Figure 4. Hurricane Helene had significant impacts on ag infrastructure, all crops (and forestry), dairy and meat processing facilities, and created widespread devastation to the agricultural community. The Weathered But Strong Georgia Hurricane Relief Fund started as a way for farmers to rebuild after this tremendous storm.

Environmental Swabbing Training

Over the summer, an environmental swabbing training was held in Macon for environmental health professionals with Department of Public Health. This was a unique location to conduct this training in, as this was a school cafeteria with its own manufacturing and packing equipment onsite. It was a great opportunity to not only train inspectors on environmental swabbing, but to also tie in the Department of Education's school nutrition and food safety professionals as well.