

Building an Integrated Laboratory System to Advance the Safety of Food and Animal Feed

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF YEAR TWO PROGRESS REPORT

September 1, 2013 – February 28, 2014

The Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO), the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) and the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) continue to work towards meeting the goals of a five-year Cooperative Agreement with FDA to support food and feed testing laboratories seeking to achieve, maintain and enhance their accreditation to the ISO/IEC 17025:2005 standard.

Improvement in the operations, efficiency and effectiveness of laboratories via accreditation to the ISO 17025 standard is integral to building and implementing an Integrated Food Safety System (IFSS). A nation of accredited laboratories can be leveraged to facilitate mutual reliance, open sharing of data, implementation of program standards, consistent determination of risk and interdisciplinary team building.

Through the middle of the second year, 14 Association-led member groups worked on nine specific aims of this Cooperative Agreement. Workgroup involvement continues to be very robust, with over 70 individuals actively contributing. Members are committed to the work and share a common goal of participating in an integrated food and feed laboratory system in the United States.

The following are some of the successes that these groups have helped APHL, AFDO and AAFCO achieve during the second year:

- Continued hosting of a Food and Feed Laboratory Accreditation [Discussion Board](#), an on-line forum for the exchange of information related to becoming accredited to the ISO/IEC 17025:2005 standard. Registered participants include 57 individuals from 43 different state and local government laboratories.
- Updating [web pages](#) to support Food and Animal Feed Testing Laboratories seeking Accreditation, including a [repository](#) of ISO/IEC 17025:2005 resources such as best practices, standard procedures, and work plans. As of May 7, 2014, 223 documents under 14 ISO categories have been posted. The resources are available to both funded and unfunded laboratories interested in accreditation.
- Offering targeted assistance to six unfunded *ad hoc* laboratories identified by FDA. Support includes on-site visits, regularly scheduled conference calls, and review of quality manuals, SOPs, methods and document control efforts.
- Starting to develop a National Work Plan for Laboratory Accreditation Implementation. This plan will include the benefits of accreditation, the current status of State Lab Accreditation, current funding available, how data from Accredited Labs will be utilized nationally, goals of the Associations Cooperative Agreement, and timeframes for implementation.
- Participating in a Food Emergency Response Network (FERN)-wide conference call to share information on both the accreditation resource site and the discussion board. The same information was summarized in Volume 8, Number 1 of the FERN newsletter.
- Updating a spreadsheet of [currently available ISO/IEC 17025:2005 training](#) every six months. FDA and the Associations ensure effective coordination of training efforts to avoid duplication of effort.
- Releasing a second pre-recorded webinar “[ISO/IEC 17025 Road to Accreditation: The journey continues...](#)” on April 3, 2014.
- Convening a Data Acceptance Workgroup to focus on steps that laboratories can take to encourage acceptance and use of testing data by local, state and federal agencies.

- Offering effective and efficient strategies for implementing the suggestions and recommendations of the [discovery report](#) on data exchange. The report initially identified gaps in the current landscape among food and feed testing laboratories and FDA's eLEXNET. Included in this work is an examination of core data elements in order to identify the minimum data elements that meet the test reporting best practices for message exchange as outlined in the PFP Best Practices Manual. We are also providing feedback on eLEXNET upgrades.
- Releasing to FDA data from a survey titled "Food and Feed Testing Laboratories Informatics and Data Exchange Capabilities" for research and strategic planning purposes.
- Maintaining a [Subject Matter Expert \(SME\) Registry](#) hosted on the AFDO website to include food and feed laboratory professionals. As of May 7, 2014, the registry includes 56 Food Laboratory SME's. The registration process was published in the FERN newsletter, Volume 8, Number 1.
- Surveying State food safety surveillance programs to understand the scope of programs currently implemented and provide feedback to further enhance the food safety system.
- Establishing a [web based information portal](#) to expand data collection and integrate both public and protected tools for effective sharing of resources for improving the food/feed safety systems with respect to laboratory accreditation.
- Continuing development of a competency based career spanning training curriculum framework which identifies the necessary competencies and training for food and feed laboratory professionals to participate in an integrated laboratory network.
- Presenting a Sampling Workshop at the 2014 MFRP Alliance Workshop with a simultaneous webcast to assist laboratory and state manufactured food programs in developing sampling agreements to support surveillance, enforcement and foodborne outbreak investigations.
- Maintaining a Laboratory Managers Steering Committee with participation of FDA staff which provides input into activities conducted under the sampling agreement, identifies issues and makes recommendations in support of an integrated laboratory network, develops an annual laboratory managers training program held in conjunction with the AFDO Education Conference and collaborates with the MFRP Alliance to interpret and recommend changes for MFRPS Standard No. 10, Laboratory Support.
- Developing a sampling guidance document called GOODSamples (*Guidance On Obtaining Defensible Samples*) to ensure consistency in the collection and handling of food and feed sampling materials to improve data quality and accuracy.
- Providing food and feed testing laboratories access to [AAFCO's accredited PT programs](#) that meets ISO/IEC accreditation requirements for FSMA critical tests in feed, food and pet food. The [Pet Food Program](#) is experiencing a highly successful second year and the [Mycotoxin Contaminants Program](#) kicked off in March 2014.
- Releasing the revised [AAFCO Quality Assurance Quality Control Guidelines](#) for State Feed Laboratories in February. The guideline is the official guidance document for feed laboratories seeking compliance with AFRPS and accreditation to ISO/IEC 17025:2005 standard.
- Developing a list of [relevant proficiency testing providers](#) for food and feed laboratories.
- Performing a cost analysis of the different models of courier systems available for transporting clinical isolates associated with foodborne illnesses to public health laboratories.
- Creating a series of [electronic informational brochures](#) that describe the work under this Cooperative Agreement. Topics completed so far include: Available Resources, Strategies, and Tools; Data Exchange activities; the AAFCO PT Program; Sampling and Sample Handling efforts; and the AAFCO Quality Assurance Program.

The three Associations are committed to meeting the goals of this Cooperative Agreement. The collaborative efforts of APHL, AFDO and AAFCO will serve to facilitate and expedite ISO 17025 accreditation of governmental food and feed testing laboratories by: providing infrastructure that encourages resource sharing and communication among laboratories; providing guidance, training and services; and providing face-to-face opportunities to share experiences and ideas. The sense of community developed through this cooperative agreement will endure long after the five-year funding period, supporting laboratories as they attain and maintain ISO accreditation for years to come. The cumulative impact of these efforts will be an increased number of ISO 17025 accredited governmental food and feed testing laboratories working in partnership within a truly unified food safety system for the advancement of public health.