



# Environmental Health Regulatory Food Safety Program Capacity Assessment

Initial Assessment Results Summary  
April 2011

Summary assessment report compiled by  
the National Environmental Health  
Association (NEHA).

## Introduction

NEHA and AFDO have been asked to conduct an EH regulatory food safety program capacity assessment by CIFOR. CIFOR members are interested in knowing what impacts budget cuts may be having on the capacity of local and state regulatory food safety programs—and specifically on those programs that conduct environmental investigations during foodborne disease outbreaks. Having completed workforce capacity assessments for epidemiology and laboratories, there was a remaining need to do an assessment for EH personnel. Additionally, with state and local EH programs experiencing drastic budget reductions in the current economic climate, there was consensus about the urgency of completing this remaining assessment. This assessment is intended for EH and regulatory food safety managers and directors who oversee regulatory food safety programs within local, tribal, and state departments that conduct environmental investigations during foodborne disease outbreaks.

Because of the urgency to have basic information quickly, an initial assessment was created using Zoomerang. The assessment was both anecdotal and qualitative and addressed EH foodborne illness investigation capacity issues such as fewer staff/resources, less training, less capacity. NEHA, AFDO, and NACCHO disseminated the assessment to EH and food safety managers and directors. The assessment was launched March 24, 2011, and closed April 8, 2011.

NEHA announced the assessment through e mail to its state and regional affiliates, Certified Professional in Food Safety credentialed list, CDC's EH listserv, NEHA's e News electronic membership newsletter, and on its Web site, Facebook page, and through Twitter. AFDO directly e mailed the assessment to its list of state food safety program managers and are encouraging everyone

# Environmental Health Regulatory Food Safety Program Capacity Assessment Questions

[\* indicates mandatory questions]

1. \*Please provide the following information:

State:

Name of jurisdiction or organization you work for:

Job Title:

2. \*Please indicate the level of government in which you work:

Local agency (city, county, district, etc.)

Tribal agency

State agency

None of the above

Services offered to  
the general public

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5. If you indicated in Question 4 that programs have been decreased, increased, or outsourced, please identify these programs and the extent in which they have been affected.

6. \*Please indicate any impacts experienced in your food safety program's inspections over the last two years. Check all that apply.

- More inspections conducted
- No change to the number of inspections conducted
- Fewer inspections conducted
- No longer conduct inspections
- Increased backlog of inspections
- Have contracted out inspections to third party auditors
- Unable to meet routine regulatory inspection requirements
- Other, please specify:

7. \*Specific to your food safety program's capacity to investigate and respond to foodborne illness outbreaks please indicate the degree to which the following have been impacted over the past two years.

	>50% decrease	25 49% decrease	1 24% decrease	No change	1 24% increase	25 49% increase	>50% increase
Program funding							
Staff size							
Training for staff							
Qualifications and competency of staff							
Other food safety workload expectations							
Other workload expectations							

8. Please describe any anecdotal examples in your community of negative health impacts or consequences resulting from budget cuts.

9. If you would like to elaborate on any answer you gave previously in this assessment, please reference the question and add your comment here.

10. If you are interested in providing more detailed information regarding your jurisdiction and budget cut impacts, please provide your name and e mail address below.

11. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results from this assessment, please provide your name and e mail address.

## Assessment Results Overview

Provided below is an overview of results intended to highlight some main points, information, and trends obtained through the assessment.

### Assessment Participant Characteristics

75% of assessment participants indicated working at a local government agency and 25% indicated working at a state government agency.

Feedback was received from 78% of U.S. states, along with feedback from two U.S. territories.

66% of assessment participants indicated a job title that can be readily classified as management level.

### Administrative Capacity

- o Furthermore, 33% indicated a decrease in services offered to retail food facilities, 32% indicated a decrease in services offered to other government programs and departments, and 37% indicated a decrease in services offered to the general public.

Comparing local and state agency results:

- o For the most part, the percentages for programmatic capacity impacts were similar among local and state agencies.
- o Areas where percentages differed by 10% or more were:
  - Ability to support government mandated services: 30% of local agencies indicated a decrease between 1 and 24%, compared to 44% of state agencies.
  - Inspection fees: 62% of local agencies indicated no change, compared to 49% of state agencies.
  - Ability to conduct environmental assessments/investigations in response to outbreaks: 15% of state agencies indicated an increase between 1 and 24%, compared to 5% of local agencies.
  - Ability to respond/investigate consumer foodborne illness complaints: 17% of state agencies indicated an increase between 1 and 24%, compared to 4% of local agencies.

### Trends in Program Effects

Local agencies indicated a decrease in the frequency of inspections, staff sizes, and training/outreach provided to retail food facilities and the general public.

Local agencies indicated an increase in inspection fees, in house training of staff, and workloads.

State agencies indicated a decrease in the frequency of inspections and staff size.

### Regulatory Food Safety Program Inspection Impacts

25% indicated that they were conducting more inspections while 31% indicated that they were conducting fewer inspections.

20% claim they are unable to meet routine regulatory inspection requirements.

Comparing local and state agency results:

- o For the most part, the percentages for regulatory food safety program inspection impacts were similar among local and state agencies.
- o Areas where percentages differed by 10% or more were:
  - No change to the number of inspections required: 40% of local agencies indicated no change, compared to 22% of state agencies.
  - Fewer inspections conducted: 26% of local agencies indicated conducting fewer inspections, compared to 44% of state agencies.
  - Increased backlog of inspections: 19% of local agencies indicated an increased backlog of inspections, compared to 32% of state agencies.
  - Unable to meet routine regulatory inspection requirements: 16% of local agencies indicated being unable to meet routine regulatory inspection requirements, compared to 32% of state agencies.



## Regulatory Food Safety Program Capacity to Investigate and Respond to Foodborne Illness Outbreaks

In terms of program funding, staff size, qualifications and competency of staff, and