

**Progress Report: 2013 NEED/NERA FOOD SYSTEMS PLANNING GRANT: March, 2014**

**Project Title:** Regional Collaboration Using Mental Modeling of Small-Scale and Direct Market Farmers to Develop Produce Safety Curricula that Results in Behavior Change

**Project Purpose:**

To develop a multi-state research project to 1) understand how mental models may facilitate or act as barriers to small-scale and direct market farmers adopting food safety practices on their farms, and 2)utilizing the information from the mental model research and adult education theory, explore which educational methods are most successful at effecting positive changes in produce safety behavior among small scale and direct farmers.

**Team members:**

- Jason Parker, Ph.D., UVM Agricultural Experiment Station (PI)
- Virginia Nickerson, Ph.D., UVM Extension Center for Sustainable Agriculture
- David Conner, Ph.D. University of Vermont
- Loir Pivarnik, Ph.D., University of Rhode Island
- Nicole Richard, University of Rhode Island
- Amanda Kinchla, M.S., UMass Extension
- Rich Bonanno, Ph.D., UMass Extension
- Diane Hirsch, M.P.H., University of Connecticut Extension
- Alexandra Bell, Ph.D., University of Connecticut
- Jason Bolton, Ph.D., University of Maine Cooperative Extension
- Mark Hutton, Ph.D., University of Maine Cooperative Extension
- Catherine Violette, Ph.D., University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension
- Heather Bryant, M.S., University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension

**Progress and Accomplishments to date:**

Over the past year, we used the NEED/NERA funds to support two face-to-face planning meetings, with at least one, and in most cases two representatives from each New England state. We conducted a literature review and developed a work plan and logic model for a research and educational project exploring farmer's mental models around produce safety and the economic impacts associated with developing a produce safety plan. We submitted a 2014 proposal for a NERA planning grant to continue this work, which was not funded and recently submitted a Letter of Intent to AFRI under the Agricultural Economics and Rural Communities (AERC) program area. Our group is committed to the idea that the six New England states should create one unified research project and educational curriculum for small scale and direct market produce growers who will be exempt from the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). We have started some graduate assistants working on the project, using existing program funds and are actively sharing work through google docs. We will be posting all of our educational resources for

The team and project have evolved over time, adding an economist from University of Vermont, and a vegetable and berry specialist from University of Maine, and a greater emphasis on the economic aspects of adopting food safety practices. Jason Parker is the new PI. We intend to apply for an AFRI grant under the Small and Medium-Sized Farms, Integrated Project: Applied Research and Extension priority area.

*Handwritten notes in purple ink:*  
CWA  
work  
James  
FODET  
feels  
food  
system  
support  
from  
AFRI

**First Planning Meeting:** October 17-18, 2013, Durham, NH

**Outcomes:**

- conducted review of relevant literature
- developed project objectives and work plan
- developed logic model for a multi-state collaborative research and education program
- created google docs folder for Northeast Produce Safety Coalition
- created a list of potential funding sources
- individual members spoke with Center for Food Safety, Produce Safety Alliance, and AFRI re: potential funding sources
- inventoried relevant resources (existing research or funds within our group, literature, data or educational materials outside of group)
- submitted application to NERA Planning Grant Proposal – “Northeast Regional Program to Ensure Produce Safety on Exempt Farms by Addressing Farmer Needs” (not funded)
- planned second meeting

**Second Planning Meeting:** February 5, Portsmouth, NH (also leveraged funds from individual programs)

**Outcomes:**

- developed plan for creating shared regional website for educational materials relating to produce safety that will be available to farmers and the public
- developed work plan and budget for project to submit to AFRI under Agricultural Economics and Rural Communities (AERC) program area
- submitted an LOI to AFRI for project titled: Defining and overcoming economic factors hindering adoption of food safety practices by small and medium sized farms in the New England region