

The Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS): An Overview

The Northeast Center to Advance Food Safety (NECAFS) is a **proposed collaboration** among the 12 states (CT, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, WV) and the District of Columbia that make up the Northeast region which aims to jointly **advance understanding and practice of improved food safety** among the region's **small and medium sized produce growers and processors**. The project partners have planned the center due to expressed stakeholder need for training related to the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and in response to US Food and Drug Administration call for proposals for such a center.

Our stated goal is to build a **Northeast regional network infrastructure** to support a national food safety training, education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance system to **increase the understanding and adoption of established food safety standards**, guidance, and protocols through a comprehensive **food safety training, education and technical assistance program** for those affected by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) with a particular, regional focus on the needs of owners and operators of small and medium-sized produce farms, beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, small processors, or small fresh fruit and vegetable merchant wholesalers.

NECAFS planned objectives to reach this goal include

- **Building collaborative Capacity and Competency** - Leverage existing efforts among the 12 states and one district in the region to enhance collective knowledge and build consensus on best practices in food safety via dedicated administration and network facilitation. Jointly develop improved food safety understanding and certification (PSA, FSPCA, etc.), articulate that understanding and enhance the topical knowledge of others through high impact educational programming.
- **Fostering Diverse Community Partnership** – Establish a participatory structure that welcomes diverse membership and values diversity. Recruit strategic and operational partners from all relevant sectors in the region. Encourage and reward sharing of existing resources, collaborative development of new resources, joint efforts in research, and team teaching in educational programming. Provide intentional, diligent network facilitation to ensure clear communication and sustained engagement.
- **Educating a Focused Target Audience** – Develop, deliver and evaluate educational programming for owners and operators of small and medium-sized produce farms, beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, small processors, or small fresh fruit and vegetable merchant wholesalers. Programming will be funded via sub-contracts on a proportional and competitive basis each year. Diversity of delivery methods, geography and cohort demographics will be required. Innovation in curricula, delivery and evaluation will be encouraged.
- **Promoting National Integration** – The efforts of the regional center will inform and be informed by national efforts, trends and regulations.
- **Making a Positive Impact** – Measurement of progress toward the goal is a critical objective of the regional center. It will be important to demonstrate measured impact among the network and the target audience throughout the region through strong evaluation, verification and validation processes.
- **Planning for Sustainability** – The center will need to secure additional funding to be sustained beyond the initial incubation period. This responsibility will be shared among the PD's on this proposal, future executive team members, network participants and the center administrator.

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