

Cooperative Agreement with FDA Strengthens Wisconsin's Response to Food Safety Emergencies

Release Date: May 14, 2019

Contact: Leann Duwe, Public Information Officer,
(608) 224-5005, leannm.duwe@wi.gov

MADISON – As part of a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) was awarded federal funding to lead the development of a rapid response team for food-related emergencies. The goal for states participating in FDA's Rapid Response Team Program is to minimize the amount of time between when a human or animal food emergency occurs and implementing a multi-agency response to prevent and reduce exposure to a foodborne illness.

“A major challenge addressing a food-related emergency is collecting and organizing information from multiple public health agencies so we can quickly understand and mitigate the emergency,” said Dr. Steve Ingham, DATCP's Division of Food and Recreational Safety administrator. “It's important for agencies to work together in a potential outbreak situation. The Department of Health Services interviews people who got sick, the State Laboratory of Hygiene figures out what microbes made these people sick, and the DATCP lab tests foods to confirm whether these microbes were present in suspected foods. Our goal is to build an integrated food safety system involving all industry, government, and consumer partners to ensure food produced in Wisconsin is safe and wholesome.”

As part of the agreement DATCP will receive \$300,000 each year for the next five years to fund Wisconsin's rapid response team initiatives, including surveillance, data sharing and analysis, communications, staffing, and training. From 2015 to 2017, Wisconsin's rapid response team was unfunded, or voluntary. While Wisconsin was not federally funded at that time, DATCP continued to operate a rapid response team with limited resources.

DATCP's rapid response team is in the process of implementing a strategic plan to ensure program goals are met and best practices are adopted. “We appreciate FDA's recognition of the important roles state agencies play in protecting the food supply and look forward to continuing our partnership for a national integrated food safety system,” said Ingham.

Jeanne Ayers, Department of Health Services State Health Officer also states that “Illnesses caused by the foods we eat or drink are of great concern to the public, and when an outbreak occurs, the public wants answers quickly. A rapid response team improves coordination between agencies, which helps us to conduct our investigations, institute control measures, and provide useful information to the public more quickly. We're grateful to the FDA for the funding to help our agencies work together on this critical public health matter.”

For more information about:

- Food safety in Wisconsin, visit https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/FoodAndRecSafety.aspx
- FDA's Rapid Response Team Program, visit <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/fda-voices-perspectives-fda-experts/rapid-response-teams-mark-10-years-collaboration-public-health-emergencies>

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DATCP's Division of Food and Recreational Safety regulates the entire food chain – from the agricultural producer to the consumer. Food safety issues affect producers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers; requiring a comprehensive approach to address these issues. DATCP licenses and inspects nearly 24,000 food, lodging, and recreation establishments; issues over 6,000 personal licenses; and supervises more than 55 city, county, and multi-unit jurisdiction health department inspections for retail food establishments, lodging, and recreational businesses such as campgrounds and public pools.

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