

Workshop on Mechanisms for Improved Food Safety Data Access and Sharing

Washington, DC | March 2, 2007

Goals and Agenda

Topics and Goals

This small invite-only workshop will bring together members of the food safety community to discuss possible improvements in the means by which food safety information is shared or made accessible. We hope for around 30 participants and presenters, including representatives of federal, state, and local government agencies, the private sector, the research community, and consumers.

The first three workshops in the FSII project focused on the major parties collecting and sharing data – federal, state, and local agencies in the public sector, firms and associations in the private sector, and academics and others in the research community – whereas this workshop will focus on the “mechanisms” that facilitate the sharing of data among these and other parties. The “mechanisms” are often technological in nature, such as data networks or websites, but are reliant on agreements and understandings between institutions or organizations that are inherently non-technological.

Thus, the workshop will discuss not only the possibilities and limitations of technological solutions for data sharing, but also the underlying conditions that will work to enable or preclude their development and/or success. The workshop is focused around a small number of concrete examples of current mechanisms to ensure a practical discussion of the issues. The first two sessions of the workshop are focused on discussing aspects of seven mechanisms for information sharing and access. A third session furthers these discussions, while a fourth session focuses on the institutional roles and resource needs with respect to developing and maintaining such mechanisms. The ultimate goal of the workshop is to develop specific, realistic ideas for how information systems and other mechanisms can be further developed to improve data access and information sharing.

Agenda

7:30 – 8:30 AM BREAKFAST

8:30 – 9:00 AM INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- Welcome and introductions of participants
- Brief background on and status of the FSII project
- Review of agenda and goals for the workshop

9:00 – 10:15 AM DATABASES AND ELECTRONIC NETWORKS: INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR IMPROVED FOOD SAFETY

Presentations:

eLEXNET (Electronic Laboratory Exchange Network)

– Ellen Olson, Office of Regulatory Affairs, FDA

eFORS (Electronic Foodborne Outbreak Reporting System)

– Tracy Ayers, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

ComBase (Combined Database for Food Microbiology) & PMP (Pathogen Modeling Program)

– Vijay Juneja, Agricultural Research Service, USDA

This session will focus on how information systems – such as databases and electronic networks – foster information sharing and access. Put simply, information systems are means for recording, storing, and integrating information in a single place. They may connect different kinds of data, or the same data type collected in different places, by different parties, or over time. The goal of the session is to use three examples to learn some practical lessons applicable to the broader FSII, such as when certain approaches are likely to be useful, and when they may not. Questions to answer about each of the three systems include:

- Why was the system originally created? Who uses it?
- How has the system developed over time?
- What obstacles, problems, or issues have been encountered in the development and subsequent use of the mechanism? How have they been overcome?
- What factors (legal, policy, business, technical, resources, etc) most impacted the development of the system? What factors impact its continued operation?
- How has the system improved the sharing of information? How is this measured?
- What are the incentives for information partners to participate in the system?
- Does the system have restricted access? If so, why, and who has access? What are the benefits, limitations, and obstacles to broader access?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits to the system? Any unexpected downsides?
- How can the system be improved?
- What lessons can be learned from this system that can be broadly applied to the FSII?

10:15 – 10:30 AM BREAK

10:30 – 12:00 PM FOOD SAFETY WEBSITES AND LISTSERVS: USING THE INTERNET TO SHARE AND DISSEMINATE INFORMATION

Presentations:

Foodrisk.org (formerly the JIFSAN Food Safety Risk Analysis Clearinghouse)

– Steven Gendel, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, FDA

Food Safety Information at the National Agricultural Laboratory

– Yvette Alonso, National Agricultural Library, USDA

Food Safety Network

– Doug Powell, Kansas State University

FoodSHIELD

– William Krueger, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

This session will focus on the use of websites to foster the sharing of and access to information. Whereas the first session will target databases and electronic networks, the purpose here is to discuss the use of the web in a broader context. Websites can be used in a number of ways: as repositories for data, as gateways or hubs to track information, to filter news and information related to food safety, or to improve avenues of communication. The goal of the session is to use four examples to learn some practical lessons applicable to the broader FSII, such as when certain approaches are likely to be useful, and when they may not. Questions to answer about each of the four systems include:

- Why was the website originally created? Who uses it?
- How has the website developed over time?
- What obstacles, problems, or issues have been encountered in the development and subsequent use of the mechanism? How have they been overcome?
- What factors (legal, policy, business, technical, resources, etc) most impacted the development of the website? What factors impact its continued operation?
- How has the website improved the sharing of information? How is this measured?
- What are the incentives for information partners to participate in the website?
- Does the website have restricted access? If so, why, and who has access? What are the benefits, limitations, and obstacles to broader access?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits to the website? Any unexpected downsides?
- How can the website be improved?
- What lessons can be learned from this website that can be broadly applied to the FSII?

12:00 – 12:45 PM LUNCH

12:45 – 1:30 PM DISCUSSION: DATABASES, ELECTRONIC NETWORKS, AND FOOD SAFETY WEBSITES

Led by: Mike Batz

This session is intended to continue the conversations begun in the morning. The goal is to broaden the discussion beyond the seven example mechanisms. Central questions to be discussed in this session include:

- What is the current and potential utility of databases, electronic networks, websites, and other information systems for improving food safety?
- What are the key factors (legal, policy, business, technical, resources, etc) limiting the utility of such mechanisms, both inherently and as seen in current practice?
- What does experience to date suggest about how these mechanisms can be more useful in the future?

1:30 – 2:45 PM INSTITUTIONAL ROLES AND RESOURCE NEEDS: WHO WILL BUILD MECHANISMS, AND HOW WILL THEY BE FUNDED?

Led by: Mike Taylor

This session will focus on the real challenges of institutional roles and resource constraints in moving forward to improve the food safety information infrastructure. Databases, electronic networks, websites, public-use data sets, and other mechanisms may be the technological means by which data are shared, but their success is reliant upon solid agreements between parties, incentives among participants to ensure their active use, and commitments for the resources necessary to develop and maintain them. This is a particularly difficult problem given the number of stakeholders and institutions involved across the public, private, research, and consumer sectors, and the diversity of missions and funding realities among these institutions. Likewise, improvements to the system may be in numerous parties' interest, but it is unclear who can, could, or should take the lead in making improvements, or the roles of other institutions in the process. The central questions for this session are:

- What conditions justify investments in mechanisms for improved data access and sharing?
- What is the likelihood such investments will be cost-effective, and under what conditions?
- With respect to different kinds of data collected by different institutions, what institution(s) should take the lead in developing mechanisms?
- What role can third parties – namely institutions or agencies other than those responsible for data collection – play in improving broader sharing of these data?
- What opportunities and obstacles exist for funding of improvements to the food safety information infrastructure?

2:45 – 3:00 pm BREAK

3:00 – 3:45 pm SYNTHESIS AND NEXT STEPS

Led by: Mike Taylor and Mike Batz

The goals of this final session are to (1) identify the most critical issues affecting the use of technological and non-technological mechanisms for food safety data access and sharing, and (2) create a list of realistic opportunities on which further effort may be fruitful.