Conference for Food Protection
Executive Board Meeting Committee Report

This report must be submitted to your Council Chair for review so that it can be approved and submitted to the Executive Board via the Executive Director 30 days before each Executive Board Meeting (held in Spring and Fall of each year). The report must be accompanied by an updated committee roster on the Excel spreadsheet provided (Committee Members Template) located here: http://www.foodprotect.org/work/.

COMMITTEE NAME: Standardized Data Collection and Electronic Reporting of Inspections

COUNCIL (I, II, or III): II

DATE OF REPORT: March 30, 2013

SUBMITTED BY: Chair: Ann Marie McNamara and Co-Chair Sheri Morris

COMMITTEE CHARGE: (indicate Issue Number and text from Issue stating the Committee Charge)

Issue #: 2012 -- 11 -- 35

Charge: The Conference recommends that a committee be created to study how health department inspection data can be collected more uniformly through the use of standardized formats to enhance public health. Utilizing Food Code Annex 7, Form 3-A (Food Establishment Inspection Form) and Guide 3-B (Instructions for Marking the Food Establishment Inspection Report, Including Food Code References for Risk Factors/Interventions and Good Retail Practices) as the starting point, the committee is charged to consider:

- Uniform violation categories/types, by utilizing the FDA inspection form,
- Consistent scoring methodology, and
- The best means of electronically collecting, analyzing and sharing inspection data.

The committee will report on its findings, along with implementation recommendations at the 2014 CFP Biennial Meeting.

These activities should be undertaken with the intent of eventually creating a national database to warehouse inspection data from contributing states, local jurisdictions and other sources.

COMMITTEE'S REQUESTED ACTION FOR BOARD (If Applicable): None

PROGRESS REPORT / COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES WITH ACTIVITY DATES:

This is a very large committee comprised of 38 members from state, local, and federal government agencies; consumer groups; academia; the retail and food service industries; and computer software companies. This large number of members is indicative of the importance of this committee to its members. Members are very passionate to see this enterprise succeed. No one who requested to be on this committee was excluded from membership.

Meetings of the Committee were held on January 30, 2013 and March 28, 2013, and this committee has had some very passionate and robust debate about our charge and the completion of our Charge. We began our dialogue by asking Health Department members to describe their experience in developing and using electronic databases for reporting health inspection reports. Specifically, the Chair requested information on "What works well for you and what doesn't?" and "Do you currently use Form 3-A for reporting health inspections?

We heard the experiences of four states in developing and utilizing electronic databases for health inspection reporting. These states were: Pennsylvania, Ohio, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Carolina. In brief, the Committee discussed and identified the following advantages to health departments that developed electronic databases for health inspection reporting:

- Better staff uniformity in reporting violations due to training efforts
- Tablets are used by inspectors in the field
- Predefined comments can be selected decreasing inspection time
- Inspector leaves a printed version with the restaurant
- Electronic inspections can be accessed for consumers and others to see
- Cost savings were noted over manual system costs once the system was implemented

The Committee also identified some pitfalls in developing an electronic database. These included:

- Teaching inspectors to use an electronic data system was a stumbling block
- No scoring system: only scoring is count of risk factor violations and "repeats"
- Internal assessments being done of IN/Out/NA/NO of compliance and 'overall' compliance
- Initial cost of database development and tablets

The use of Form 3-A was then discussed. Some states were using Form 3-A for their data elements in their database and some were using data elements matching their individual codes. Discussion then ensued concerning whether convincing the numerous state, local, and county regulators in the U.S. to use Form 3-A was even possible considering the lack of harmonization of regulations. Not all states are using the current version of the Food Code.

Discussion then turned to industry members whose companies have developed commercial, electronic databases for health inspection reports. These databases use existing state and local health inspection reporting formats and map inspection content to Form 3-A for reporting purposes. If the inspection categories do not match Form 3-A exactly, then either the most close match is used, or that data is not reported. The example used was that if the database maps to 54 items, and the data form only has 26 corresponding items, then only those 26 are reported.

Concern was then raised that if not all items on Form 3-A were being collected then the usefulness of a national electronic database would be limited. Missing information would not be available to users of the database, rendering the data less effective.

Discussion then considered the difficulty in harmonizing multiple health inspection forms. In order to have the states use Form 3-A there must be an overarching reason to change. It was suggested that the Committee look at the Form 3-A for determining what information should be collected, how to collect the data, and what might be a suggested scoring system, whether Form 3-A is used or not. Debate then ensued as to whether the charge to the Committee was requesting that Form 3-A be used in its entirety for the data elements of a national database, or whether the Committee should look at Form 3-A to determine what data elements should be collected.

Debate was intense, and an initial vote showed an equal split of voting members voting for using Form 3-A in its entirety, versus using Form 3-A as a starting point to determine which data elements should be included in a national database. A second round of discussion and debate over the merits of the two interpretations of our charge to the Committee took place. Pro's and con's of each approach were discussed at length. After hearing from a variety of members of the committee from state, local and federal government agencies, the industry, and data software companies, another vote was taken. This vote overwhelmingly favored using Form 3-A in its entirety to form the elements to be included in the national database, with only one vote being cast for using Form 3-A as a model. The overwhelming deciding factor by Committee members in choosing this direction was that Form 3-A was developed and vetted by another CFP Committee and that the data elements were chosen based on their public health significance. This concludes one element of our charge to the Committee: to develop uniform violation categories and types by using the FDA inspection form.

The Committee then accepted the Chair's recommendation to split into two working groups: one comprised of the software companies and one comprised of other stakeholders. The goal is to have the computer companies develop a white paper outlining how a computer database can be developed using Form 3-A to collect data elements, and the best means of a process for collecting, analyzing, and sharing inspection data. This will be a multi-tiered database that can encompass health inspection reports utilizing Form 3-A in its entirety, as well as health inspection reports in which comparable data elements can be mapped to Form 3-A. The stakeholders working group will work on developing a consistent scoring methodology for health inspection reports to be included in the database.

The Committee also requested that two informational meetings be held for the members to gain more insight into their projects. The Chair will set up meetings with representatives from the state of Florida which recently developed an electronic database. The group wishes to hear about the cost involved and complexity of the project. Two speakers will be requested: one from the regulatory agency, and one from the IT group that developed the database. A second meeting was requested of the computer company representatives in our Committee to discuss in detail how databases could be developed for non-technical Committee members. These two meetings will be quickly set up and the working groups will begin their tasks. A complication of having such a large Committee is the difficulty in setting up meeting times in which the majority of Committee members can participate. Separating into two working groups should help alleviate this complication and speed progress toward the development of the final white paper.

With the committee consensus on using Form 3-A in its entirety as the basis of the national database, we anticipate rapid progress and completion of the white paper and committee charges on time.