Meeting Minutes

Meeting called to order at 10:00am

Members Present:
Nancy Stephens, Chair, *Florida Poultry Federation*
Amy Duda-Kinder, *Duda and Sons, Inc.*
Amy Mullins, *UF/IFAS Leon County Extension Service*
Matt Colson, *Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)*
Dan Ellinor, *Fish and Wildlife Commission*
Dr. Neil James, *FAMU*
Dr. Qinchun Rao, *FSU – Nutrition*
Renee Goodrich – *UF/IFAS*
Rick Barney, *Southeastern Grocers*
Michael Lombardi, *Lombardi Seafood*
Geoff Luebkemann, *Florida Restaurant and Lodging*
Michael Roberson, *Publix, Inc.*
Scott Shalley, *Florida Retail Association*
Ned Bowman, *Florida Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association*

Other Guests in Attendance:
Dr. Matt Curran, *FDACS Div. of Food Safety*
Nichole Enfinger, *FDACS Div. of Food Safety*
Chris Hilliard, *FDACS Div. of Food Safety*
Lorena Holley, *Florida Retail Association*
1. Roll Call and Introductions
   - Nancy Stephens gave welcome/introduction and asked secretary Nichole Enfinger to call roll to determine if a quorum was met.
   - Roll was called, and the required number of members were present to make a quorum.

2. Approval of Agenda
   - Michael Roberson moved to approve the draft of the meeting agenda. The motion was seconded by Dan Ellinor. All were in favor of approving the agenda.

3. Approval of Minutes
   - Dan Ellinor moved to approve the draft of the council meeting minutes from December 18th, 2019. The motion was seconded by Dr. Neil James. All were in favor of approving the minutes.

4. Election of Vice Chair
   - Nancy Stephens stated that the election process for a vice chair has taken over a year. Amy Mullins was introduced as the vice chair nominee during the December 2019 meeting, but a quorum was not met during that meeting and an election could not take place at that time.
   - Amy Mullins introduced herself and gave a brief background. She is a registered dietician, IFAS educator, Leon County Extension Service faculty member, and is pursuing her Ph.D. in Nutrition Science from Florida State University.
   - Geoff Luebkemann moved to nominate Amy Mullins as the vice chair. Ned Bowman seconded the motion. All were in favor.
   - Nancy Stephens congratulated Amy and welcomed her as the new vice chair of the council.

5. Covid-19 Industry Update
   - Nancy Stephens gave a brief introduction to the topic. This pandemic is uncharted territory and we have never had to face anything like this before. If people in the health field are the first responders, the food industry and people involved in food safety are the second responders to this crisis. Thank you to everyone in the background for keeping our food safe. There are many new challenges to keep food safe, and many issues have been in the press. Examples include:
     a. How safe is it to get take out or to eat out at restaurants?
     b. How to interpret expiration dates?
     c. Dairies dumping milk and other dairy products.
     d. Consumers leaving groceries in their vehicles to decontaminate for days before bringing them inside.
e. Consumers hording groceries.

f. How to handle grocery take out.

• Nancy Stephens stated that since this is an advisory committee, it would be good to discuss two topics. The first is to hear from FDACS Division of Food Safety on challenges they are facing and steps they have taken in response. The second is to hear from industry members on challenges that they are facing. Sharing what challenges everyone is facing could be a good way to learn from each other and share resources.

• Matt Colson- FDACS Division of Food Safety- We’re all adjusting as we go. We appreciate the situation in the industry and are aware that retailers are experiencing high volume in their stores. Food safety is as important as ever and Covid-19 issues could be compounded even more with contaminated products. Our field staff are still doing inspections, but we have changed our approach to be considerate with the situation for industry. Our staff are calling ahead to arrange visits for less busy times, are practicing social distancing during visits, have been issued PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for their safety, and are following CDC guidelines. We are having frequent communication and regular updates with field staff to relay info as things progress. The inspection approach is different. We are not conducting full inspections but are focusing on imminent food safety hazards such as functioning water and wastewater sources. We have found establishments operating without hot water, handwashing, or sanitation procedures in place. Staff is focusing on high touch areas, making sure industry is aware of CDC guidelines, and helping to educate operators. We have found issues out there to reinforce the need for food safety inspections. Our staff is still out there and adjusting to the situation.

• Dr. Curran- FDACS Division of Food Safety- We want to stress the importance of being in the field. Our field staff found a facility that was operating with no running water. If an establishment has no water and no sewage, it is not operating in a safe manner. This was in a county with an already high number of Covid-19 cases and their employees couldn’t wash their hands. This action by the division potentially stopped a problematic hotspot and is an example of how our inspectors are helping “flatten the curve.” Also, in reference to the Executive Order to prohibit food consumption onsite at food establishments, we have found, at last count, 7 establishments permitted by our division that were allowing onsite consumption. Our staff being out there have been able to issue stop use orders to help prevent the spread of this disease. At the same time, we are still concerned about our inspectors’ safety. They have been provided with PPE, are making visits at less busy times, and are focusing on high touch surfaces. It is critical for us to be out there and we would like to thank our team publicly for helping to protect the public.

• Nancy Stephens- Thanked Dr. Curran and the FDACS team and hoped that the division has adequate PPE for field staff.
FLORIDA FOOD SAFETY & FOOD DEFENSE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING  
Statewide Conference Call  
April 15th, 2020  
10:00AM – 11:05 AM

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• Dr. Curran- It has been a constant struggle to find PPE, but it is important to continue to protect our staff.
• Question- Dr. Rao- When an inspector sends samples to the lab during this time, are there any guidelines to handle the samples?
• Dr. Curran- We have suspended all routine sampling activities. We will collect if we have a specific reason to go out there, but we have curtailed most field sampling at this time. If samples are delivered, the lab staff sanitizes coolers before they open them and are cognizant of the potential of the virus to be transferred.
• Nancy Stephens asked for industry members to take time to share.
• Michael Roberson- Publix, Inc.- Appreciates the opportunity to share response to Coronavirus at Publix. Most important thing is for the safety of customers, associates, and community. They are very proud of the dedicated work of their associates and thank their customers for their trust. They are keenly focused on intensive and ongoing measures to protect their stores. The focus has shifted to heightened public health practices while maintaining food safety. Measures include a heightened sanitizing program for high touch surfaces, providing associates with 14 days paid leave for needed quarantines, plexiglass shields at registers, PA announcements on social distancing while in stores, one way directional aisles, dedicated hours for high risk individuals and 1st responders, preventing employees from working when sick or experiencing flu like symptoms, adjusting hours to allow time to sanitize and restock store, providing gloves to associates, limiting number of customers allowed in the store, providing permanent pay increases in recognition for associates’ service, and reminding shoppers to clean reusable shopping bags. Publix has 3 dairy processing facilities and their volume has increased. They have not had to dump excess milk. They are working with suppliers to redirect food normally distributed to restaurants and are working with food banks to assist with refrigerated and shelf stable foods.
• Amy Duda-Kinder- Duda and Sons, Inc.- They have similar to topics as Mr. Roberson. They are located nationally and throughout counties in FL and are dealing with federal, state, and local ordinances. They have reduced office staff to 30% capacity. Ag operations employees have been provided facial coverings in work with processing and harvest. Communication with staff is ongoing on based on CDC for hygiene and personal health. HR is managing any issues with illnesses or potential exposure and they have had no positive covid-19 diagnoses and very few absentee due to virus. They are proud of their employees’ acceptance of their role as essential employees.
• Amy Mullins- UF/IFAS Leon County Extension Service- Being involved with UF/IFAS statewide, there are county agents in every county. The UF extension is open and available to clients. They are working remotely, and fielding questions form public. A food safety extension specialist is on hand and they are having weekly meetings to address concerns.
and develop food safety education. They have discussed ideas regarding food safety concerns for grocery delivery workers. Agents are distributing educational materials through social media and webinars. An ongoing effort by the IFAS communications team is to develop resources to share with communities. Links are available to share with everyone on the call. Emails are constantly filled up and it is hard to pull together all the resources, but a good coordinated effort is happening in the name of community education. They want to share what we know on the front lines of food safety with consumers and the public to feel that their food supply is safe.

• Question- Nancy Stephens- Are extension offices open with limited staff, or are they closed? Answer- Physical locations are not open. County personnel are checking phones and are on call during business hours. Info is on websites to contact agents directly. We are open virtually.

• Dan Ellinor- Fish and Wildlife Commission- The commercial fishing industry is trying to get their products out with restaurants closed. It is hard to get products to dealers and hard for dealers to get products to industry. Trying to get products out to consumers and navigating food safety regulations are increased challenges.

• Dr. James- FAMU- They are not doing anything specific to food safety. Students have been sent home. Teaching is still provided, and they are informing students on steps to take to protect themselves. They are offering nutrition and food safety information tips on social media.

• Dr. Rao- FSU Nutrition- As a researcher from FSU, they had a long conference last week on collaborative research on the topic of fighting covid-19, specifically finding key funding and opportunities to fight the pandemic.

• Question- Nancy Stephens- Can genome sequencing play any role in this?

• Answer- Dr. Rao- Definitely. Several countries, including France, know the sequence with RNA and proteins, know how to test to detect antibodies, and will help develop vaccines, but it will take time. Sequencing related to food safety is not that urgent, we must deal with human patients first.

• Renee Goodrich- UF-IFAS- building from Amy Mullins’ comments- On the main campus, one of the main things they are working on is assembling a Covid-19 resource page for the whole extension system. They have fact sheets from CDC, FDACS, and other agencies and can provide links afterwards. Food processing plants, growers, harvesting, and U-pick resources have been provided. They are working on combating misinformation by participating through media outlets after press releases. They have partnered with FDACS Fruit and Veg. division on produce safety and grower training. The Food Safety Alliance has come up with a Zoom-based official training and will be rolling it out in the next couple of months to meet needs of stakeholders and growers for when regular inspections re-start.
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- Rick Barney- SE Grocers- They are conducting many of the same practices as other large retailers across the country. They have hired 5,000 new associates in last 6 weeks as business has increased in grocery stores and they are partnering with large hospitality restaurants to bring their out-of-work staff into their stores. They are working with food service companies to bring restaurant-like foods into their facilities. They appreciate FDACS changes on egg labeling requirements and have started health screenings each day for associates to have a safer workforce and protect the public. Their pharmacies are trying to understand antibody testing and may be able to offer this testing in the future. There is much work to be done to understand what this means and how it will be done.

- Michael Lombardi- Lombardi seafood- They are an operator that offloads boats, distributes, and has a retail market. Distribution to restaurants has collapsed entirely. Restaurants that are operating are moving to less perishable options and moving away from seafood. It is hard for commercial fisherman to continue to fish with decreased demand. Most of the business is in the retail sector. It is hard to coordinate fisherman. Supply has been high with a lot of stock that distributors are trying to handle. Much of the supply was frozen and slowly distributed. There is more focus on local seafood and keeping local fisherman working, which is a bright side for local fisherman. Overall demand is still down. On their retail side, they have experienced a lot of the same things that have already been said on this call. Their biggest focus is trying to keep their staff employed and safe. This is a huge change in the seafood sector in the state of FL overall. The majority of seafood trade is in the hospitality sector and they are waiting to see what happens as that sector comes back to life.

- Geoff Luebkemann- FL Restaurant and Lodging Assn.- It’s not a surprise that the industry is under catastrophic stress. The hospitality sector has been impacted with 90% sales decreases and unemployment is catastrophic. 14% of state’s workforce is not able to work; either furloughed or terminated. Small businesses employ 52% of Americans and 25% of those businesses are at risk of permanent loss. Their focus is on helping membership and industry at large navigate these times. Focus is on liquidity and credit, working with banking and financial community, and helping members navigate relief and support resources. They have brought resources together on their website with a dedicated Covid-19 landing page that has all manner of info on the public health and financial business sides. They are starting to plan on safe business resumption, which is based on consumer confidence. Other projects include working with the lodging side of industry to garner interest in providers who can house lodging needs specific to Covid-19. There are three categories involved in Covid-19 lodging response: 1- First responders, national guard, etc. 2- Those in need of isolation such as cruise ship passengers. 3- Housing those in need of medical care. They are also working on meal programs. 4 Rivers BBQ, Feeding Florida, and Dept. of Elders Affairs have partnered and are planning for and filling needs for elder meals and student meals.
Many students get nutrition from school food service and there is an immediate and important need with them being home. At FeedtheNeedFL.org, restaurants can express an interest in supplying student and elder meals. They are also planning on general needs for feeding demands.

- Scott Shalley- had to leave the call early. Loretta Holley is filling in for him for the FL Retail Association- They continue to act as a liaison for grocery and convenience store members by helping members navigate ordinances and regulations related to masks, sanitation, and occupancy requirements. They are also helping them comply with federal, state, and local requirements. Thank you to many state partners for their help. An EBT online pilot program is being developed.

- Ned Bowman- FL Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Assn.- They have 1,500 members on a call every Mon, Wed, and Fri. Their industry is not suffering as bad as the restaurant associations. Gasoline sales are down. Some stores are closing early and going through a deep clean every day. They are working with store owner liability on potential Covid-19 related lawsuits from people saying that they contracted the virus at their store. They are working on relief packages based on convenience store workers being classified as first responders.

- Nancy Stephens- Florida Poultry Federation- They have stringent biosecurity measures in place on all their farms. Employees are still coming to work and there are plenty of eggs. Where is the problem with egg restrictions at grocery stores? The bottleneck is with the cartons to put the eggs in. Approx. 55% of eggs in the nation go to retail market. The rest go to schools and food service. They have recently seen a 30% increase in eggs going to the retail market. Measures by the USDA and Commissioner Fried from FDACS to temporarily waive certain labeling and packaging requirements have helped, but manufacturers still don’t have capacity to provide cartons. Individual labeling requirements for each unique customer have also increased complications. Carton shortage is expected to be with us for quite some time as orders are up 150%. Problem is with raw materials. There are plenty of eggs, we just have to get them in cartons. Issues with trucking weights and hours of service have been overcome. There are also concerns with people hoarding eggs and questions about dates and how long they are good for.

- Nancy Stephens- Any questions from any members? If there are any, email them to Nancy Stephens or Nichole and they will get them to the right place. Opportunity for suggestions or recommendations for the Div. of Food Safety? Forward them on if any come up. Commissioner Fried has been asking for anyone to share ideas that they have to help the situation. An industry group has formed on how to restart the economy in a measured way that does not create chaos.

6. New Business
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- No comments

7. Next Meeting/Adjourn
   - Nancy Stephens proposed that the next council meeting be held in November 2020 unless something comes up related to the virus or another emergency in the meantime. As the time get closer, members will be polled for a date. Thank you everyone and continue to encourage members to work together for ideas or help.
   - Rick Barney moved to adjourn the meeting. Geoff Luebkemann seconded the motion.
   - The meeting was adjourned at 11:05am.