**Food Safety Outreach Program Grant Application** -- Community Outreach Project ($150,000)

Link to [Bush Grant Proposal](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fKP3SFdoaQk6KATmIfCc-5tfagIZvf3ENRSjlXMfC_A/edit) (as an example)

Link to [Program Logic Model](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Y40epb_1OAJJ7uSnXaumOrln9Tw06ebylJA5y_OiL_Q/edit)

Link to [Narrative Points](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t7g8oeZAM_d3hggN9Tesnp_4IC8mX2OigKiJc9oPVN0/edit)

FSMA info from the RFP: “...projects that **develop and implement FSMA-related food safety training,** **education, extension, outreach, and technical assistance** to owners and operators of small and medium-sized farms, beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, small processors or small fresh fruit and vegetable merchant wholesalers.”

**PROJECT NARRATIVE** (Must NOT exceed 20 pages, 12 pt font, single or double spaced INCLUDING figures and tables)

1. **Introduction: Include a clear statement of the long-term goal(s) and supporting objectives of the proposed activities. Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities that substantiate the need for the proposed project. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities that relate to the proposed project including the work of key project personnel. Include preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed project. In addition, this section should include in-depth information on the following, when applicable:**
   1. **Estimates of the magnitude of the issues and their relevance to stakeholders**
   2. **The role of stakeholders in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation as appropriate**
   3. **Reasons for performing the work at the proposing institution or organization**

**Proposed Project**

Food safety is critical in all sizes and scales of operation, yet the implementation of food safety practices described in the Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA) by small and mid-sized farmers and food business owners faces challenges. These challenges include understanding FSMA content, matching FSMA concepts and requirements with existing state statutes and rules, and applying this knowledge to farming and business practices. A fundamental challenge that precedes even these is overcoming farmer and food entrepreneur fear of the regulatory system.

Farmers and food entrepreneurs may fear and resist the regulatory system because they do not want to jeopardize their businesses. This is typically not for a lack of interest in food safety, but rather, for a fear of not understanding the regulations and rules that must be followed and thereby being shut down by regulators. Even though many farmers and food entrepreneurs are interested in food safety, food regulatory staff sometimes believe that farmers, food entrepreneurs, and local food system advocates are closed to this topic. Therefore, there is a need for increased food entrepreneur knowledge of food safety concepts and increased inspector knowledge of small and mid-sized food entrepreneurs’ business practices. Joint discussions between food entrepreneurs and inspectors around food safety will help give entrepreneurs confidence that they can operate safely and legally as well as give inspectors confidence that entrepreneurs are partners in food safety efforts.

A further need in Minnesota is to include food system advocates in food safety training and communication. Advocate foci may include nutritious food access, food security for low-income people, profitability for small-scale farms, developing community-farmer connections, or others. These advocates are frequently players in innovative community-based models to increase production and consumption of local foods in Minnesota, and their work can spur farmers and food entrepreneurs into business practice changes. However, food system advocates may lack familiarity with the food regulatory landscape, and this can lead to unnecessary monetary and time expenses to implement change.

An example of this need for food regulation familiarity among food system advocate organizations can be seen in an example from Wabasha, MN. The Wabasha Farmers’ Market, with assistance from local food system advocates, launched an innovative produce commingling and distribution enterprise but experienced nearly a year of delay in regulatory approval due to unresolved questions, some of which included food safety (Lanthier and Van Dyke, 2016). To ensure effective deployment of FSMA within Minnesota’s sustainable agriculture and local food systems, food safety advocates must be included in conversation. This include including them in the audience for food safety trainings, and as partners with food entrepreneurs and regulators to develop safe and legal community-based food systems.

Research in the United Kingdom showed that effective and relevant food hygiene training delivered by the regulating agencies themselves, with adequate resources and the support of other entrepreneurial peers, had a positive effect on the actions of the food handler and increased the likelihood of adherence to food safety practices (Seaman and Eves, 2006). Organizational and peer support for food safety is important to food handler adoption of food safety practices. It is critical that food safety information be delivered in a way that builds trust between inspectors and those being inspected to be able to effectively discuss and deliver food safety information.   
  
An example from the world of natural resource conservation affirms the approach of trust-building a two-way street of discussion between regulators and those regulated. Farmer adoption of soil and water conservation practices faces a similar situation as FSMA adoption: complex regulatory requirements, a need for outreach and education, and farmer concerns about cost and difficulty of adopting practices. Lack of farmer control of implementation and lack of farmer trust of regulators were identified as two key barriers to adoption. Analysis of the effectiveness of outreach programs showed that defining, verifying, and clearly communicating practice benefits and feasibility were critical roles for outreach education programs; and that outreach education was more effective when all agencies were working together. Analysis of conservation outreach programs also showed that increasing information sharing about profitability and benefits increased adoption, and that this approach was more effective than regulations (Jennings, 2012).

To address the need for two-way communication around food safety, regulations, and business innovations, we propose a project to implement educational and problem-solving forums between Minnesota regulatory staff and food entrepreneurs. The proposed forums would happen twice per year in eight regions throughout Minnesota over two years for a total of 32 forums. Food regulatory staff from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and Minnesota Delegated Agencies under MDH; along with farmers, food entrepreneurs and food system advocates will participate to share information and build relationships within the region. Meeting agendas will include information from food regulators about food safety; farmers’ and food entrepreneurs’ information about their business model innovations; and advocate perspectives on matters such as improving food access and food security for low-income people. Time for networking and discussion of topics brought forward by the attendees will also be built into the meetings.

These forums will increase the chances of innovative food entrepreneurs being successful. For decades the local food community in Minnesota was small, and regulators could address the unique circumstances of local food businesses by handling licensure and inspection on a case-by-case basis. However, with the increase in small business growth, which is encouraged in and beneficial for the state of Minnesota, many of these innovative business models have struggled to fit into food safety and regulatory requirements. The struggle can be exacerbated by lack of recognition of the different motivations of the players in the system. Farmers and food entrepreneurs are motivated by the desire to succeed and be profitable, the desire for independence, belief in sustainable local food systems, and belief in the importance of nutrient-dense food. Food system advocates are motivated by concern for economies of rural or urban neighborhoods, desire for nutritious food access and food security for low-income people, and the desire to support family farmers. Food regulators are motivated by the protection of public safety. Thus, the proposed forums would create a space where inspectors, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food system advocates can talk to each other directly, share perspectives, and gain understanding of each other’s priorities and requirements. This will allow for trust to be built within regional networks of inspectors, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and advocates. Furthermore, the forums will allow for increased food entrepreneur knowledge of food safety concepts and increased inspector knowledge of business practices.

Research shows that the implementation of quality assurance systems, such as food safety protocols, in small food enterprises strengthens their positions and improves their competitiveness within the food market (Karipidis, 2008). Additionally, small-scale farmers and food entrepreneurs must innovate in order to succeed in a highly competitive market with many larger players. Although U.S. literature appears to be essentially silent on the matter of the role of innovation in successful small-scale food-related entrepreneurship, European literature repeatedly affirms the critical role of innovation in enabling success of entrepreneurs (Bhaskaran, 2005; Lordkipanidze, 2005; Avermaete, 2003; Avermaete, 2004; ). Many innovative entrepreneurs are becoming more likely to bypass the work of governments and nonprofits in order to achieve environmental sustainability and allocate sustainable resources to do so (York, 2010). The innovative farmers and food entrepreneurs, some spurred by advocate innovation, must fit into FSMA and into the state regulatory frameworks. The regional meetings would serve as a collaborative meeting space for innovative entrepreneurs and government agency employees to work together, and these meetings would facilitate entrepreneurial innovation by providing a mechanism to understand innovations and fit them into the state regulatory and FSMA frameworks.

The joint educational and problem-solving forums would help ensure awareness of the FSMA. Since FSMA is new to both regulators, farmers, and food entrepreneurs, its implementation is challenging, but is an opportunity for regulators, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and advocates to learn together. These forums would be a good opportunity for joint learning efforts. There is the potential for using the "scaffolding" method of peer learning that has been applied to elementary and junior high classroom settings: in an open-ended exercise with unclear parameters, student groups of varying skill levels generate "new learning" within a structure of free-flowing information exchange, idea generation, and discussion (Law, 2006. King, 2010). These forums would involve some businesses subject to FSMA and some exempt, but a number of businesses that are currently exempt may move into non-exempt categories as their business grows. Therefore, it is important to engage audiences that include both FSMA exempt and FSMA non-exempt individuals and businesses.

The Food Safety Modernization Act requires regulators and food entrepreneurs to re-assess their understanding of food safety requirements and learn the new requirements of the FSMA. For smaller scale, local food businesses, some - but not all - of these businesses are exempt from FSMA. Even those currently exempt from FSMA requirements, however, may need this information because of buyer expectations, because they sell alongside non-exempt businesses, or because their operations may grow to a point where they are non-exempt. An example of need to understand FSMA requirements among those who are exempt can be seen in the Wabasha Farmers’ Market Case Study (Lanthier & Van Dyke, 2016) conducted for the BGAC. In this example, a farmers’ market director desired to make a farm-to-school market connection for farmers’ market produce not sold by the end of the market. Vendors who sold at the market would be exempt from FSMA requirements individually, but when participating in the comingling produce at the end of market sales, they must meet FSMA standards. Sections five and six of the FSMA can be referenced as the rationale for some of the recommendations for farmers’ market protocol on the commingling and sorting of produce. Vendors who would themselves be exempt from FSMA in the situation of individual sales must still understand and comply with FSMA provisions for the commingled sales through the farmers market. In many farmers’ markets communities, however, FSMA provisions are unknown or misunderstood by vendors; the need for increased outreach and education on the part of regulators is needed.

Moreover, the two-way dialog modeled, regionally-based meetings would fit in with the recent (9/29/14) statement by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS): “We want to be more flexible and more responsive and we want to choose options that allow for stakeholder collaboration and buy in. Using more non-regulatory options gives us the opportunity to quickly alter our approaches as needed, for example as scientific understanding of a problem grows, as industry practices evolve, or as your needs change.” The statement from USDA-APHIS includes reference to the President's “...Executive Order 13563…the Federal Government's regulatory system must identify and use the best, most innovative and least burdensome too soft achieving regulatory ends.” Ideally, Minnesota will develop a local food systems culture in which regulators are educators, farmers and food entrepreneurs agree to be educated, and barriers to innovation and entrepreneurship are removed; these regional forums would serve to achieve this goal.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) will encourage food inspectors operating in the regions and state-level meat inspections staff to attend these proposed forums. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will open their Food Safety Partnership (FSP) meeting structure to accommodate the regional forums and encourage regional meeting attendance by MDH staff based in the region. The inclusion of MDA and MDH staff in the forums is crucial; research shows that when educators understand how farmers develop mental models, the educators can design learning programs and services that better enable the farmers’ success (Eckert, 2006).

Renewing the Countryside (RTC) will plan and facilitate the forums with the help of the Minnesota Institute on Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and the Minnesota Farmers Market Association (MFMA). The Food Safety Partnership within MDH will assist by opening their meeting structure to these forums. Currently, FSP meetings are hosted in Saint Paul, and are available for digital viewing at the seven MDH district offices located outside of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area (Duluth, Mankato, Marshall, Fergus Falls, St. Cloud, Rochester, Bemidji). This proposed project would allow for the organizing and facilitation of on-site, in-person meetings in these eight district offices instead of just digital viewings of the meetings. Furthermore, it would also allow RTC to leverage the established FSP platform and network during each regional forum as a starting point for this innovative model.

**Magnitude of the Need for FSMA Education in Sustainable Agriculture and Local Food System in MN**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of entity** | **Number** | **Reporting individual/organization** |
| MDH Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) – county-level units | 87 | Tim Jenkins, MPH, REHS  Planner Principal, Food Access Coordinator  Minnesota Department of Health  Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives |
| MDH Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) – tribal nation units | 10 | Tim Jenkins, MPH, REHS  Planner Principal, Food Access Coordinator  Minnesota Department of Health  Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives |
| MDH Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) – city units | 5 | Tim Jenkins, MPH, REHS  Planner Principal, Food Access Coordinator  Minnesota Department of Health  Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives |
| University of Minnesota Extension SNAP Educators | 125 | Tim Jenkins, MPH, REHS  Planner Principal, Food Access Coordinator  Minnesota Department of Health  Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives |
| Direct-marketing farmers, farmers’ markets, and value-added food processors listed in the 2016 Minnesota Grown directory (paid listing) | 1,027 | Minnesota Grown Program Minnesota Department of Agriculture http://minnesotagrown.com/about-us/ |
| Farmers’ Markets in MN (estimate compiled from USDA, Minnesota Grown, MFMA & Google Alerts) | 220 | Kathy Zeman Operations Manager Minnesota Farmers Market Association |
| Farmers’ Market vendors in MN reached through MFMA contacts with 220 farmers’ markets | 5,000 to 6,000 | Kathy Zeman Operations Manager Minnesota Farmers Market Association |
| Cottage Food Operators – Tier I  (up to $5,000 in annual sales of value-added food products) | 1,321 | Heather Stewart Food Inspections Program Minnesota Department of Agriculture |
| Cottage Food Operators – Tier II  ($5,001 to $18,000 in annual sales of value-added food products) | 79 | Heather Stewart Food Inspections Program Minnesota Department of Agriculture |
| Minnesota School Districts with Farm-to-School programs | 268 | Stephanie Heim et al.  Minnesota Farm to School Leadership Team |

**Long-term Goals**

The forums laid out above will coalesce regional networks, build trust between regulators and people involved in the local or regional food systems, encourage discussion and problem-solving within the network, and capture ideas and clarifications generated within the forum that will be developed into resource documents to be shared with larger in-state networks. Regulators in Minnesota will more easily and frequently share knowledge, be more accountable, have greater consistency, and have greater education and outreach capacity especially pertaining to FSMA. These joint educational and problem-solving forums will act as a roadway to achieve these ideals, and they will help promote the growth of small, innovative food businesses by helping to clarify for the business owners how their businesses fit within the FSMA and regulatory requirements.

**Key Project Personnel**

This grant application is filed in partnership between Renewing the Countryside, the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA) and Minnesota Farmers Market Association (MFMA). MISA is a partnership between the University of Minnesota’s (U of MN) College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS), University of Minnesota Extension (U of MN Extension), and the “Sustainers’ Coalition,” a group of five community-based non-profit organizations that work in areas that include sustainable agriculture, local food systems, renewable energy, and agricultural policy. Two of MISA’s key roles are to be a bridge between the resources of the University and the sustainable agriculture community; and to collect and disseminate reliable information on sustainable agriculture-related topics.

Renewing the Countryside (RTC) is a nonprofit organization in Minnesota focused on championing and supporting rural communities, farmers, artists, entrepreneurs, educators, activists and other people who are renewing the countryside through sustainable and innovative initiatives, businesses, and projects. RTC’s mission objectives of connecting people interested in sustainable rural development to each other, providing practical assistance and networking opportunities for those working to improve rural America, and fostering connections between urban and rural people are in alignment with this proposed project. RTC helped to start the Local Foods Advisory Committee and works closely with farmers and food entrepreneurs providing training, access to networks, and access to markets. Renewing the Countryside is the lead organization for this proposal. RTC will provide overall management of the grant, ensuring that all partners, collaborators and consultants work together to meet project goals and objectives. RTC will take the lead on organizing, convening, and facilitating meetings of MDA, MDH, and Delegated Authority regulators, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food system advocates at eight locations throughout Minnesota. Organization of meetings will be accomplished through RTC’s proven event development process of recruiting and paying a stipend to regional coordinators, recruiting regional advisory teams, and tasking an RTC staff person with coordinating and serving as a resource person for the regional teams.

The mission of the Minnesota Farmers Market Association (MFMA) is to provide services, programs, and leadership that support and promote farmers’ markets across Minnesota. MFMA has a membership program which gives extra benefits to vendors and farmers’ markets; the organization also provides advocacy and educational materials, helps farmers with insurance and liability coverage, and provides general information about farmers’ markets in Minnesota to the broader public. For this project, MFMA will lead networking and outreach efforts with sustainable agriculture and local food system organizations in Minnesota in order to recruit regional coordinators, regional advisory teams, and meeting participants. MFMA will also participate in publication development through writing, review, and recruitment of reviewers.

The government agency bodies in Minnesota that oversee food safety inspection include MDA, MDH and local (city or county) delegated authorities under either MDA or MDH.. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture is responsible for regulating food that falls under their Dairy and Food Inspection Division and Meat Inspection Program. The Environmental Health Division’s Food, Pools, and Lodging Services Section within the Minnesota Department of Health is responsible for regulating food as well. Lastly, delegated agencies in Minnesota are responsible for regulating food businesses within their respective areas. The MDA, MDH, and delegated agencies are key partners in this project and will provide venues, resources, and support from their existing programs to support this project.

**Past and Ongoing Activities**

Over the past eleven months, both MISA and RTC have had a leadership role in a Bush Foundation Community Innovation Grant project. This work is advised by the Bush Grant Advisory Committee (BGAC), a team of about 20 professionals who represent government agencies, community nonprofits, the University of Minnesota, and individual businesses. The project is focused on changing the approach to the regulation of local food systems in Minnesota while maintaining food safety, improving regulatory efficiency, and encouraging small-business viability (Cite Bush Grant Webpage here). Advisory committee members have examined potential regulatory and nonregulatory approaches to achieving those goals, have developed consensus on structures or processes that may achieve the project goals; and have developed strategies to change the environment around regulation in Minnesota This cross-discipline committee model has been used successfully by the Local Foods Advisory Committee (LFAC) - a group which meets to address issues and confusion around regulating innovative food businesses in Minnesota since 2011.

One expected outcome of the Bush Community Innovation Grant project is to lay the groundwork for implementing actions focused on food safety and regulatory efficiency and prioritized by the BGAC. The long term vision of the Bush grant is to promote food safety and economic development through a user-friendly regulatory system that is coordinated, reliable, and efficient. In this vision, entrepreneurs of small and large food businesses successfully navigate Minnesota’s easy-to-understand, transparent and streamlined system. Operators obtain the appropriate licenses and certifications and produce safe food for consumers. Regulators from agencies across Minnesota (MDH, MDA, and delegated local agencies) freely share knowledge and work a timely manner with entrepreneurs of food businesses and with each other. Regulatory agencies are accountable and consistent and support education, outreach and the production and service of safe food to Minnesotans. There are many projects and changes that must be implemented before this vision is achieved, and a piece of this picture includes education on the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) requirements for both regulators and food entrepreneurs. Over the course of this project’s lifetime, it has become clear that regulators in the MDA, MDH, and delegated agencies are often frustrated by the difficulty of explaining FSMA and other food safety concepts, the inconsistencies of interpretation of the statutes between agencies, and the systemic restraints that limit their ability to be effective educators to food entrepreneurs and non-regulators. Thus, this proposed project of regional meetings throughout Minnesota will help to mitigate these frustrations and increase the understanding and implementation of food safety protocols.

1. **Objectives: All applications must include a statement(s) of specific aims of the proposed effort in clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged terms.**

The objective of implementing joint educational and problem solving forums throughout Minnesota is to increase the knowledge and understanding of the FSMA, general food safety, and legal requirements of businesses for both regulators, farmers, and food entrepreneurs. Furthermore, these forums will help promote the growth of small, innovative food businesses by interpreting how they fit into the FSMA and state regulatory requirements. The specific aims of this proposed effort include the following:

* Increase food entrepreneur knowledge and inspector knowledge on issues of food safety and business practices, especially as informed by the FSMA.
* Increase MDA/MDH/Delegated inspector and staff knowledge of food entrepreneur questions and concerns.
* Better coordination and alignment among food regulatory agencies within specific regions.
* Improve food entrepreneurs’ perception and trust of MDA/MDH/Delegated authority intentions.
* Improve MDA/MDH/Delegated perception of food entrepreneurs’ willingness to comply with food safety provisions.
* Increase food entrepreneur knowledge and reduce confusion around licensing and food safety, especially around the FSMA.
* Increase the work efficiency for food inspectors fielding fewer points of confusion.

1. **Methods: Explicitly state the procedures or methodology you will apply to the proposed effort. This section should include but not necessarily be limited to, descriptions of:**
   1. **Stakeholder involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation and evaluation;**
   2. **proposed project activities, listed sequentially;**
   3. **Techniques to be employed in this project, including their feasibility and rationale;**
   4. **Expected results;**
   5. **How outreach and education activities will be evaluated;**
   6. **How data will be analyzed or interpreted;**
   7. **Plans to communicate results to stakeholder, NIFA staff and the public;**
   8. **Pitfalls that might be encountered; and**
   9. **Limitations to proposed procedures.**

**Stakeholders:**

BGAC members are stakeholders who have been involved in developing solutions to the food safety and local food regulatory issues throughout the Bush Community Innovation Grant project term. The two MDA employees, one MDH employee, and one delegated agency authority on the BGAC have all expressed interest and support for the activities laid out in this grant proposal. These agency workers will serve as resources for RTC and MISA throughout the grant term.

Regulators and staff from MDA, MDH, and Delegated Agencies will attend meetings. The MDH Food Safety Partnership existing meeting infrastructure and its eight district offices throughout Minnesota will be opened to this forum twice per year for a total of 32 meetings throughout this project. A team of Renewing the Countryside staff will coordinate and facilitate the meetings. Additionally, sustainable agriculture and local food organizations and trade associations (such as MISA, the Minnesota Farmers Market Association (MFMA), and the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA)) will assist with outreach to local food entrepreneurs, communications, logistics, and hosting.

RTC will be responsible for the workshop organization and logistics, with extra support from other involved organizations (MISA, MFMA, SFA) and with some funding for local coordinating teams that would work with an RTC staff person as the central resource person for the facilitation work. Meetings will be held at the MDH regional offices using the FSP infrastructure; the regional food entrepreneurs will gather at their nearest MDH regional offices and have face-to-face interactions between regional MDH staff, delegated authority staff, MDA food inspectors who operate in the area of the regional office, and food entrepreneurs from the region. CEUs?

The collective efforts of the stakeholders will be leveraged to complete project activities which are as follows:

* Create forums where inspectors, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food system advocates can talk to each other directly, share perspectives, and gain understanding of each other's priorities and requirements.
* Establish a mechanism for fitting food enterprise innovations into FSMA and state regulatory frameworks
* Develop a body of knowledge around effective FSMA implementation techniques that work with Minnesota’s state-level regulatory system and Minnesota's sustainable agriculture and local food community.
* Conduct outreach through broad collaboration to all local food system participants in Minnesota
* Hire project staff (outlined in budget narrative)
* Create meeting agendas, which may include presentations by food entrepreneurs about their businesses (case studies), panel discussions, a question and answer session from the field, informal networking and discussion time, presentations by regional regulators regarding food safety issues and best practices, and problem-solving around licensing or food safety issues.
* Development of food entrepreneur case studies within regions
* Development or compiling of resource documents based on feedback from the regional meetings
* Ongoing revision of meeting design and content based on evaluations and feedback from attendees

**Expected Results Based on Proposed Activities:**

* Trust is built within regional networks of inspectors, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and advocates.
* There is an increased food entrepreneur knowledge of food safety concepts and increased inspector knowledge of business practices.
* Minnesota meets the need for innovation of the farmers, food entrepreneurs, and advocates.
* There is an increased efficiency for food inspectors fielding fewer points of confusion.
* There is a robust base of FSMA knowledge and methods of implementation among regulators, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and advocates in Minnesota
* There is better coordination and alignment among food regulatory agencies within regions on integration of FSMA and licensing
* FSMA is effectively implemented by Minnesota's sustainable agriculture and local food community

**Evaluating Outreach and Education Activities**

The outreach and education activities for this project will be evaluated by anonymous surveys distributed to each forum attendee. The survey design will ensure that results can be distinguished between food entrepreneurs and regulators so as to gain as much information as possible about how to improve based on the attendees’ backgrounds. RTC and MISA will adjust the structure and design of future meetings based on the evaluations and feedback.

**How data will be analyzed or interpreted**

A portion of the impact of this work will be captured through the creation of regulator and entrepreneur case studies. Additionally, evaluations will be conducted after the end of each of the 32 meetings over the course of the two-year project. These evaluations will be analyzed and summarized into a replicable model for Minnesota to continue to use or for other states to implement.

**Plans to Communicate With Stakeholders, NIFA Staff, and the Public**

RTC, with the assistance of MISA and agency staff, will report to NIFA at designated intervals on the progress of this project. Documents created throughout this project (case studies, fact sheets, outreach materials) will be sent with progress reports and available to the public through MISA’s website and agency resources.

**Pitfalls of Proposed Procedures**

Potential pitfalls to the proposed procedures include finding willing case study participants, low meeting attendance, or low evaluation response rate. Strategies to avoid these pitfalls will be addressed by project staff throughout the project duration. Examples include working with established regional networks to encourage case study and meeting participation as well as developing a follow-up strategy for encouraging evaluation participation.

**Limitations to Proposed Procedures**

One limitation of this project relates to its qualitative research; qualitative research is not designed in a way that allows the researchers to draw definitive conclusions across regional meetings. Rather, correlations will be drawn based on the research. Another limitation of this project is that the 32 case studies are not likely to fully capture the whole range of innovations for food businesses in Minnesota. For this reason, continuing research after the project is over may take place so that information continues to be gathered.

1. **Project Timetable: The proposal should outline all important phases as a function of time, year by year, for the entire project, including periods beyond the grant funding period.**

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| --- | --- |
| **Project Duration: October 1, 2016 - September 30, 2018** | |
| **Important Phase** | **Timeframe** |
| Create forums where inspectors, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food system advocates can talk to each other directly, share perspectives, and gain understanding of each other's priorities and requirements. | October 2016 - September 2018 |
| Establish a mechanism for fitting food enterprise innovations into FSMA and state regulatory frameworks | October 2016 - September 2018 |
| Develop a body of knowledge around effective FSMA implementation techniques that work with Minnesota’s state-level regulatory system and Minnesota's sustainable agriculture and local food community. | October 2016 - September 2018 |
| Hire project staff | October 2016 - November 2016 |
| Conduct outreach through broad collaboration to all local food system participants in Minnesota | October 2016 - September 2018 |
| Development or compiling of resource documents based on feedback from the regional meetings | October 2016 - September 2018 |
| Create meeting agendas, which may include presentations by food entrepreneurs about their businesses (case studies), panel discussions, a question and answer session from the field, informal networking and discussion time, presentations by regional regulators regarding food safety issues and best practices, and problem-solving around licensing or food safety issues. | November 2016 - September 2018 |
| Development of food entrepreneur case studies within regions | November 2016 - September 2018 |
| Identify local coordinators | November 2016 |
| Identify meeting dates and locations | November 2016 - September 2018 |
| Conduct meeting evaluations | November 2016 - September 2018 |
| Ongoing revision of meeting design and content based on evaluations and feedback from attendees | November 2016 - September 2018 |

**After the grant funding period:**

After the grant funding period, project staff will ensure the distribution of fact sheets and other resource documents generated, the continued presence of case studies, the availability of FSMA training materials and other documents online, the training of inspectors by MDA and MDH, and conference sessions and workshops in 2019. It is hoped that regulators, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and advocates will continue to foster relationships, ask questions, and share information. Furthermore, a potential outcome is that agencies recognize the value of these forums after two years and secure funding to continue the meetings