Joint Food Safety Education and Food Enterprise Innovation Forums in 8 Regions of Minnesota

Project Summary

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) among small and mid-sized producers faces challenges. Initial challenges include understanding FSMA content and applying this knowledge to own-farm practices, but a challenge that precedes even these is overcoming farmer and food entrepreneur fear of the inspection process. 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. To address this, 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. Staff from the MDA, MDH, and delegated agencies, along with food entrepreneurs will hold in-person meetings twice per year to share information and build relationships within the region. Meeting agendas would include information from food regulators about food safety; farmers and entrepreneur information about their business model innovations; and advocate perspectives on issues such as food access and food security for low-income people. Time for networking and discussion of topics brought forward by the attendees would also be built into the meetings.

Furthermore, these forums would increase the chances of innovative food entrepreneurs in being successful. U.S. literature appears to be essentially silent on the matter of the role of innovation in successful entrepreneurship; however, European literature repeatedly affirms the critical role of innovation in enabling success of entrepreneurs. The regional meetings would facilitate entrepreneurial innovation by providing a mechanism to understand innovations and fit them into the state regulatory and FSMA frameworks.