

***State of Minnesota
Department of Health***

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 31, 2001

TO: CSTE Infectious Disease Consultants and Other Interested Parties

FROM: Richard Danila, Ph.D., M.P.H.
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Acute Disease Investigation and Control Section

SUBJECT: Attendance at “Bioterrorism and Food Safety – Developing an Effective National Response” (Two Meetings)

On November 12, I attended a meeting entitled “Bioterrorism and Food Safety: Developing an Effective National Response” as a representative for CSTE. I also attended a second follow-up meeting on December 12. The meetings were convened by the University of Minnesota Academic Health Center Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP), which is headed by former CSTE President and former Minnesota state epidemiologist, Dr. Michael T. Osterholm. The meetings were held in conjunction with the University of Minnesota Academic Health Center Center for Animal Health and Food Safety and the School of Public Health Division of Environmental and Occupational Health. Of interest, since these were University-convened meetings, they were held under differing data privacy rules than most governmental meetings, and were considered to be closed private meetings not subject to be open to media or others.

The purpose of the meetings was to facilitate discussion among key U.S. food leaders about the risks of and responses to food terrorism events. Attendees included representatives of industries ranging from the farm to the table including fruit and vegetable growers, produce suppliers and trade representatives, grain producers and processors, meat (including poultry) industry producers and processors, food manufacturers, grocery suppliers, restaurant owners (including franchised operations), and food trade associations. Also included were academicians representing veterinary medicine and infectious diseases, and governmental officials representing CDC (Foodborne and Diarrheal Diseases), FDA, USDA, Department of Defense (second meeting only), FBI (second meeting only), and state health and agriculture departments.

At the first meeting, various food industry representatives presented their viewpoints and recent experiences. The consensus was that great concern about food terrorism existed at all levels of the food industry. Indeed, many had already spent considerable resources in improving food security and responding to hoaxes or incidents or perceived threats since September 11, 2001.

Terrorists could disrupt the food system through contamination of the end food product, damaging the agricultural production system, disrupting food distribution, or through hoaxes that would undermine consumer confidence. As stated at the meeting, the food industry needs to protect the consumer, its workers, food animals, their physical plants, and their business. The major food brand producers and franchised restaurant chain operators felt particularly concerned

for fear they would be targeted. Several specific needs were expressed by attendees including a primer on likely biological/chemical agents to be used in food terrorism, a threat assessment of such agents and how they might be detected, a listing of testing laboratories available to the food industry, a system by which industry could share information with each other including intelligence information, and industry-specific guidance action plan documents. All wanted to meet again, so a second meeting was convened.

At the second meeting, the notion of an industry-based secure database listing security threats was discussed; no conclusions were made. A framework for guidelines and emergency response document drafted by CIDRAP was presented and discussed. The various security steps that food processors can take to reduce the threat of attack include: risk assessment (what are the agents?), planning for an emergency (who does what?), operational risk management (analyze the probability of an event and implement controls appropriate to the risk), implement standard security measures for employees and for the physical plant, review operating procedures for risks, and develop communications messages/plans.

In the food system, threats might include any or all of the following: 1) discovery of a physical characteristic that suggests possible contamination of the product, 2) observing suspicious behavior by an employee or someone else suggesting a security breach, 3) receiving a message that a product has or will be contaminated, 4) reports of illnesses associated with a product. Different levels of response would be needed depending on the threat. An action-oriented industry specific guidelines document is needed.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the need of a primer/matrix of agents was again expressed. The need for an industry/governmental meeting was also expressed. CIDRAP will work on a mission statement, coordinate with documents being produced by FDA, and try to secure funding for future meetings.

I would be happy to discuss the meetings in more detail or provide documents that were presented at the meetings.