



**Partnership for Food Protection  
Information Technology Workgroup  
(PFP IT WG)**

**Coffee Talk with  
Eric Nelson**

**State Program Champion  
Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM)  
U.S. Food and Drug Administration**

The [PFP IT WG](#) recently had the pleasure of a Coffee Talk with Eric Nelson. The IT WG's goal is to promote data standards to improve the ability to share food safety regulatory data electronically among strategic partners and support timely and accurate decision making. To achieve this goal, the workgroup has undertaken technical projects that are advancing abilities to harmonize a compatible IT environment among all food safety officials.



**Hello, Eric! Tell us about yourself, and your new role and responsibilities as State Program Champion within the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM).**



In my current role as senior advisor to Animal Food Program leadership, I provide insight and guidance to enhance our existing FDA and state partnerships, as well as explore new opportunities to make a stronger [Integrated Food Safety System \(IFSS\)](#). I believe I have a unique perspective given my experiences with CVM, the [Association of American Feed Control Officials \(AAFCO\)](#), the industry, and state program management. State programs are the regulatory face that industry sees.



**What are the primary objectives of the Animal Food Regulatory Data Exchange (AFRDX)?**



The main goals of the AFRDX are to support the management of animal food programs through the dynamic use of current inventory reconciliation and the application of risk-informed work planning.



**Share some of the notable challenges with collaboration of animal food programs and how they connect with public health and safety. Share your favorite success story.**



The emergence of [Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy \(BSE\)](#) in the early part of the 21st century presented opportunities that most animal food regulators had not fully embraced, direct connection between animal food and human health. Until then, the focus of many animal food programs had been consumer protection and managing the risk presented by medicated feed and concerns with drug residues in eggs, meat, and milk. Collaboration between FDA, the [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#), AAFCO, and state programs resulted in the implementation of one of the most successful regulatory efforts of the past few decades. Literally, overnight state programs changed their focus from consumer protection to public health protection. This enabled additional attention and resources both on the state level as well as federal-level FDA contracts and grants.



**The PFP plays a crucial role in enhancing collaboration among various agencies. Share examples of successful CVM collaborations that have contributed to improving animal health and food safety.**



The model programs that PFP workgroups have put together have helped standardize processes across the entire food safety universe, including animal food programs. Whether it is work planning, emergency response or complaint inquiries, these are plans developed by people on the frontlines. Practical, focused, and fully developed for implementation.



**How do you foresee the AFRDX being used to increase animal food data sharing and collaboration with state partners?**



My hope is that it standardizes the processes currently used between FDA and its state partners. In doing that, we believe it becomes routine and provides focus to the shared mission that we have, to ensure the safety of our animal food supply and contribute to positive public health outcomes. As someone who has been married for 35 years, I've learned that successful partnerships are built on good communication. One thing that I hope comes out of the AFRDX is that both FDA and state personnel develop a greater understanding of the work each does to support our common objectives and goals. The work doesn't have to be identical in execution to meet common objectives.



**How does CVM's work support the development of new technologies and approaches that address health needs across human, animal, and environmental health sectors?**



CVM is an active member of the agency's IT Advisory Council (ITAC) and ensures that priority projects get the necessary support for implementation to advance our mission. However, CVM projects must compete with all the other projects in the agency.



**Tell us a bit about the mission and purpose of the AFRDX Workgroup (WG).**



After seeing what had been done with Non-Contracted Inspections (NCI) data from participating states, the Animal Food Program looked at the routine work states do, outside our funding opportunities, and decided to try something different. We analyzed three datasets with the aim of improving the work planning procedures employed by states and the FDA. This involved boosting the frequency of inventory reconciliation and identifying critical risk indicators from inspections and samples initiated by states. The AFRDX does not use state inspections and samples data for compliance activities, since the state has already responded to non-compliance. However, extracting data that we can use in our Animal Food Risk Algorithm, helps us better understand the relative risk of firms subject to [FDA 507 rules](#). In reciprocal practice, we hope to supply state programs with similar data to enhance their risk-informed work planning processes.



### **Share some of the accomplishments and plans of the AFRDX WG.**



The AFRDX is still in development. However, what I see as the WG's greatest accomplishment, so far, is that we have brought together experts from all segments of the agency's Animal Food Program, and we are viewing and appreciating the program work done by our state counterparts. This understanding, alone, will enable both FDA and state programs to leverage work done independently to meet our common objectives to protect public health.



### **How is CVM working toward increasing data sharing with State Animal Food Programs?**



CVM has a long history of working with states as well as AAFCO. Primarily that history has been with our respective roles in determining the suitability of animal food ingredients. State programs contribute to our surveillance and compliance efforts through contract work and program activities supported through cooperative agreements. The [Food Safety Modernization Act \(FSMA\)](#) compels us to work with states. It appears that states share our need for more data to drive crucial decisions to meet their strategically planned objectives and goals. I believe that once data sharing becomes routine, we all will rely on that data exchange bringing us closer to mutual reliance and an effective IFSS.



### **What are the key advancements or initiatives in animal food and feed safety regulation, and how will they impact the overall protection of animal health?**



We started our conversation today with BSE, which was a very dramatic demonstration of the connection between animal food and human health. That was the beginning of change for animal food programs across the country. Then along came melamine. While that incident in 2007 melamine in animal food posed no significant risk to humans, it was deadly to pets. I believe it is still the greatest consumer complaint event in FDA history. I also believe that it and other food safety events compelled Congress to enact the FSMA. We further supported the evolution of animal food programs, with the development of the [Animal Food Regulatory Program Standards \(AFRPS\)](#) which helped establish strategic data driven food safety programs for animal food. We now have the recognition of the connection between animal health and public health, the authority to regulate the manufacture and distribution of animal food, and a risk based strategic integrated animal food safety system to further ensure public health.



**Finally, is there something fun and interesting about yourself to share with the readers? (Hobbies, interests, vacations, pets, etc.)**



Wow, funny or interesting, let me think. I live in a geodesic dome, and of course we have pets. I've been a lifelong dog person since I brought home a stray and convinced my parents to let me keep her. We now have a Yorkshire 'terrorist' living with us. When my kids were younger, we had everything from guinea pigs, cats, dogs, and rabbits to name a few. At one point I said, "No more pets. The next animal anyone brings home, I'm going to eat it." The next animal our oldest brought home was a Chilean rose tarantula. Well, I gave up.

The PFP IT WG would like to thank Eric for his support, and we look forward to continued collaboration with the CVM and expanding the PFP IT WG and ORA DX program.

Contact us at [appsdesk@fda.hhs.gov](mailto:appsdesk@fda.hhs.gov) if you have any questions or would like additional information.



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