

Response to Southern Region's MRC comments: S_temp1077

Comment 1: We agree that the project will benefit from USDA-ARS, CDC, FDA participants. How do you plan to recruit those players? Personal invitation? Invited speaking engagements? Visit their labs?

Response: For additional clarification on how we will engage key personnel from USDA-ARS, CDC, and FDA, we have added the following text to the revised version of the project proposal:

Page 14-15 (bullets #2 and 3): "This will specifically be achieved by inviting key persons from the aforementioned groups to participate in our annual meetings and present in the proposed pre-meeting short courses (see Milestones) when applicable. Personal invitations will be the primary method to engage these stakeholders as our group is both diverse and well-connected." AND "As indicated, collaborations already exist among many in this group and USDA-ARS scientists; thus, recruitment of these scientists for participation in this multi-state project will again be primarily by personal invitation."

Page 17 (2018 Milestones): "2018 – Increase participation of USDA Agricultural Research Service scientists through active recruitment (See Objective 3 for specific approach)"

Comment 2: Does this group visit food industry sites to hear first-hand what kind of issues the industry has regarding microbial food safety? If so, report it. If not, I suggest including a food industry stop in conjunction with the annual meeting.

Response: Yes, our group visits food industry sites during each annual meeting, and this has always been a positive contribution to our group of researchers. We plan to continue these site visits over the next five years, and we have added the following text to the revised version of the project proposal:

Page 15 (bullet #6): "Another example of how our group has already established this type of networking is through the engagement of specific, local food industries during each annual meeting. For example, in 2015, we toured an aquaculture operation in Rhode Island, and the following year, in New Mexico, we visited a start-up salsa factory to learn about the challenges they may have faced with respect to implementation of food safety regulations. Food industry visits have been a staple during the past five years of this project, and fully plan to continue this type of engagement at our annual meetings."