

Title: Strengthened Food and Agricultural Sector Defense Posture through Improved Private Sector Information Sharing

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Center of Excellence: Food Protection and Defense Institute (FPDI)

COE Lead/Co-Lead Institution: University of Minnesota

Project Start Date: 07/2014

Project Completion Date: 06/2016

Project Status: Complete

Research Theme: Information Sharing

Participating State(s): District of Columbia, Minnesota

Amount Awarded to Date: \$224,847

Award Number: 2010-ST-061-FD0001

Abstract: Information sharing between the public and private entities within the Food and Agriculture Sector, if properly managed, could be one of our nation's most powerful tools to combat food defense risks. There are varying levels of success with information sharing within the Food and Agriculture Sector, but little research has been done to ascertain current procedures and standardized approaches, in addition to remaining barriers. A mixed methods approach was used to identify current threat information sharing techniques, barriers, and recommendations for next steps and improvements. Results infer that there is not a standardized approach in information sharing, highlighted in the limited use of sharing platforms such as the Homeland Security Information Network and InfraGard, and the variety of agencies in which information is reported to and received from. There also appears to be rooted misconceptions or misunderstandings lingering across the sector. In order to improve these barriers, several private sector respondents recommended increasing opportunities for communication with the public sector, to create a centralized location for all resources and training available to the sector, and a webinar be held on the handling of classified and declassification of information.

Project Type: Research

End User Engagement:

- Food and Agriculture Industries
- Food and Drug Administration
- State and Local Public Health Agencies
- State and Local Regulatory Agencies
- Trade Authorities

Executive Summary (2016): The Food and Agriculture Sector is largely under private ownership. Strides have been made to increase partnership between the public and private sectors, and to improve the security and resiliency of the Food and Agriculture Sector as a whole. One of these key facets is streamlined communication across the sector, especially if there is a notable or impending threat. However, few studies have been done to understand if and what standard communication procedures are followed. The objectives of the study are to provide an insight into the baseline understanding of current threat information sharing techniques between public and private partners within the Food and Agriculture Sector, and to identify barriers still hindering optimal communication. To accomplish this, NACCHO used a mixed-methods approach, interviewing key stakeholders of the Food and Agriculture Sector and surveying private sector trade associations and their members. Results infer that there is not

a standardized approach in information sharing. Use of sharing platforms such as the Homeland Security Information Network and InfraGard were limited. In addition, respondents indicated receiving information from and reporting to a mix of agencies. There also appears to be rooted misconceptions or misunderstandings lingering across the sector. In order to improve these barriers and create a more standardized approach to threat information sharing, several private sector respondents recommended increasing opportunities for communication with the public sector. Recommendations were also made to include education on the resources and procedures available, which can ultimately lead to a more standardized approach. In addition, in order for all entities across the entire Food and Agriculture Sector to access all available materials, a central repository should be dedicated. Classified and the declassification of information seemed to be rooted in the misconceptions as differing viewpoints were offered between the public and private sector. To improve understanding, Federal government officials should host a webinar to provide a space to learn about and discuss the process of classified, declassified, and sensitive but unclassified information and how it is shared. As the public and private sector continues to work together, the Food and Agriculture Sector's resiliency and security will only continue to improve.

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