



General Meeting, 11/3/2025, 1:00 pm

Zoom Link:

https://www.google.com/url?q=https://coreshield.zoomgov.com/j/1611677119?pwd%3DkRaL6S2yLo4FtIpYucfAOm3wpacUjg.1&sa=D&source=calendar&ust=1759841662792749&usg=AOvVaw1wymwDEta_AQpe5sOc-mBT

1. Welcome - Thao Schlichte (DIAL), Task Force Advisory Board Chair
 - a. During the welcome, the slide asked attendees to answer the question “What risky food safety information or videos have you seen on social media that keeps you up at night?” Answers included foods prepared in a hotel, foreign contaminants in foods, videos advocating washing poultry prior to cooking, Amish canning or putting cloves of garlic in honey and leaving it out on the counter, and videos about consuming chicken tartare and the promotion of raw milk.
2. Iowa Department of Inspections, Appeals & Licensing (DIAL) Update - Merri Cross, Grant Coordinator
 - a. Aaron Baack is DIAL’s new Interim Director, as Larry Johnson, Jr. is now IHHS’ Director.
 - b. The Food Safety Bureau now has 39 permanent full-time staff, and 4 part-time staff (interns and temps). There are no vacancies at the Bureau.
 - c. Last year’s notable achievements include adding 5 counties to DIAL’s regulatory oversight (Buena Vista, Calhoun, Ida, Pocahontas, and Sac. 10,516 food safety and lodging inspections were completed last year, a 4.5% increase from 2023. The Administrative Rules were updated for Social and Charitable Gambling and Home Food Processing Establishments as a requirement of Executive Order 10.
 - d. The notable initiatives for this current year include the upcoming updates to the Food and Lodging Administrative Rules. The first public hearing will be held November 4. The licensing and inspection system is undergoing modernization. The system is known as SAFHER (System for Agriculture, Food, Health, E-inspections, and Registration). DIAL has been working for 4 years on this system started by AFDO, and Iowa will be the first state to implement it. Testing and



development have been ongoing since July 2025 and the system will go live in October 2026.

- i. One of the more unique features of SAFHER is how a facility's public health risk is determined. It will be determined by the foods produced, the manufacturing processes the facility uses, and the types of operation (grocery store, restaurant, warehouse, etc.). The factors determine a risk level and a base inspection frequency. This will allow Iowa to focus inspection resources on facilities with a higher public health risk.
- e. No questions from attendees

3. RRT Update - Thao Schlichte, Rapid Response Team Coordinator

- a. Thao gave a summary on complaint responses. Total complaints have been going down since 2023 but so far this year there are 1834 total complaints. Illness complaints are also down, this year there are 181. The number of Environmental Assessments is also on a downward trend, this year just 4 have been conducted. And, there are also fewer Emergency Responses, only 31 this year.
- b. Thao gave an overview of how 2025 RAGBRAI went and the outcomes of the After Action Review (AAR). Tasks to complete include: better explanation of the use of ICS to DIAL staff, including the roles of the Safety and Logistics Officers; revisiting the communication guide and improvements in handouts/checklists and town forms for use by field staff, and updating the kickoff presentation for field staff.
- c. Thao also introduced the work completed by several Iowa agencies in updating the Food Emergency Response Plan (FERP). The final version was completed and distributed July 2025.
- d. The annual RRT meeting was held September 15-17, 2025. Thao shared the RRT team photo which was a baseball theme. She also shared the RRT poster describing the Iowa RRT 2024 response which highlighted the disaster response to a tornado and flooding, RAGBRAI, and highly pathogenic avian influenza.
- e. No questions

4. Task Force Board Update - Bambi Press (IHHS), Task Force Advisory Board Vice Chair

- a. The Governance Guidelines were updated after the Spring 2025 General Task Force meeting, and were posted on the Task Force website.



- b. Information regarding the Advisory Board nominations will be sent to Task Force members in early 2026. Voting on Board members will take place at the Spring 2026 General Membership meeting.
- c. Bambi shared the topics of high interest revealed from survey responses sent to members after the Spring 2025 meeting. Those topics are agricultural products on the farm, food or feed labeling, and hydroponic farms.
- d. No questions

POLL: What is your favorite Thanksgiving food?

- a. #1 was pumpkin pie, tied for second was turkey, mashed potatoes, and green bean casserole.

5. Freeze-drying and Rehydration Panel - James S. Dickson (ISU), Ph.D., Moderator

- a. Mary-Grace Danao, University of Nebraska – Lincoln
 - i. Grace shared a QR code to follow along with her presentation.
 - ii. People freeze dry because...Blue Alpine systems are marketed well for home processors – Harvest Right machines are easy to use, it's all automatic, but users may not know how to monitor processes. Prices have gone down over the years. Vitamins and nutrients are preserved in the food even with the process which removes moisture.
 - iii. What is freeze-drying? "Lyophilization", a stabilizing process in which the food is first frozen then the water is reduced, to a final water activity that will no longer support mold, yeast and bacterial growth. It is a batch process.
 - iv. Why freeze dry? Preserve vitamins, enzymes, extend shelf life...
 - v. Basic process: Freezing food in a regular freezer, added to the freeze-drying machine for vacuum freezing and then heating up to steam and remove more water. Heating pads turn water into steam, then the steam touches the outside of the chamber and becomes ice. More sublimation reduces vacuum pressure, and then the heating pads are turned off to increase vacuum pressure.
 - vi. Products dry from the outside to within.
 - 1. Use a knife to cut food in half to check for a wet center, called "meltback."



2. Take samples along edges of the trays and in the middle of trays to verify.
 3. Grace explained the process to determine the end weight of a freeze-dried product, see the slide.
- vii. Consumers need to be careful of portion sizes.
 - viii. Freeze-dried foods should be packaged with oxygen absorbers if the food has a high fat content and could go rancid.
 - ix. Freeze-dried foods are crunchy, dehydrated foods are leathery and chewy.
 - x. There is a reduction in bacteria, but not all bacteria are killed in the product.
 - xi. Grace shared best practices for food safety on slides at the end of her presentation and a list of resources, mainly Extension guidelines from other states. She is working on a series of guides for Nebraska to be published later, mainly guides on using equipment, for a layperson who wishes to begin freeze-drying.
- b. Julie Kraling, Retail Program Manager, DIAL
- i. Julie addressed the temperatures of the process are not high enough to cook the food and kill any pathogens in the food. There must still be bare hand contact prevention, cross contamination controls (freeze-drying raw meats then other foods, etc.), cleaning and sanitizing equipment.
 - ii. Licensing depends on who the producer is selling the product to. These can be done under cottage food laws as long as the food is sold direct to the consumer. Cottage law requirements apply (especially labeling).
 - iii. Jim said every store he goes to has freeze dried foods and he wondered how well they comply with regulations.
- c. Ellen Ciarimboli, Hy-Vee, Inc.
- i. There is a lot of concern what could happen or how can food safety be managed with the equipment. She has concerns with rehydration and the bacterial risks involved in that, since bacteria is just in suspension during freeze-drying.
 - ii. She asks where is it produced, where is the food stored, what types of equipment do you have, how are allergens controlled. She also asks for labels, including weights and measures.
 - iii. People have asked to do chicken, soup blends, microgreens into powder, etc.
 - iv. She is concerned operators don't understand the process and may not have total control. It takes time to ask all the questions and find the information.
- d. Questions for the panel and from attendees
- i. Jim had a discussion with an individual who wanted to buy 4 machines and set them in tandem to get the volume to start commercial production – meat and



poultry, ice cream, etc. What do you tell people when all they know is taking the machine out of the box and plug it in?

1. Julie: I first ask, what do they want to do, where do they want to sell it, how do they want to sell it? She describes the labeling requirements. She is also concerned about the conditions of their homes and the process in the home, for those freeze-drying the foods as a cottage food. People getting the home food processing establishment license need to keep records and have standardized recipes, etc. before they can get a license and inspection.
 - a. The owner of a retail store needs to ask if they have a license, if they don't, then they cannot sell their foods at the store.
2. Grace: she deals with people who compare Nebraska with other states. She mentioned Janis H. from IDALS mentioned in the chat that meats and poultry or egg products to other than household consumers need to be licensed by USDA/FSIS or state meat inspection. She mentioned freeze-dried ice cream is not considered by USDA to be a TCS food and may not need to be licensed by USDA.
 - a. Her lab helps people work through the process with process validation of small batches. This helps them determine if they can make products under cottage food laws for NE.
 - b. NE has a grant to allow high school ag programs to purchase freeze driers. She doesn't like that the teachers focus on the business aspect and not the science of the process. One school was selling freeze-dried meat jerky during school events, but have no idea of the food safety issues.
- ii. Jim asked Ellen about her concerns with rehydration, and what does she tell consumers who want to do that with their products.
 1. Ellen said she has learned about potatoes designed to be rehydrated, in a committee. She said there isn't much science out there determining the risk of Listeria in these products. She has helped write a guidance document and instructs processors to have exact rehydration and cooking instructions on their labels.
- iii. Jim asked Janis Hochstetler to provide input on meat/poultry/egg issues.
 1. She said they don't have anyone yet in Iowa licensed to freeze-dried these products but one is undergoing the vetting process. They usually see some people want to put together freeze-dried meals. There is a lot of opportunity for education of processors on this.
- iv. Jim discussed freeze-dried eggs and the Department of Defense. A lab in MA has done work on this, testing these products.
- v. Grace said an inspector from MN gave her some info. A person wants to freeze-dry soup mixes, wants to make the products to last 25 years. Grace doesn't know where most producers think the foods will last 25 years, but she thinks it



came from a retired food science professor who tested foods stored for long periods of time (not published in peer-reviewed journals). The tests showed most items do not last that long – foods do not look good or are not “fresh”. The products in the test were not freeze-dried.

1. Ellen said she asks producers for a best-by date and they do not want to put it on, they like 2050 as a nice round date. She recommends they put an expiration date of 6 months on the products.
 2. Janis said shelf-life studies are foreign to meat processors, and they are educating them on how to do that. She is working with local universities to provide education to processors.
- vi. Grace recommended going to AFDO’s website and search for freeze-drying and non-thermal processing guidance. She said they are building up a library.
- vii. Bambi Press added a question in the chat: Does the panel have suggestions for any high-quality resources for end consumers of these products summarizing food safety concerns? I'm thinking about our Older Americans Act nutrition programs that also provide nutrition education for susceptible populations.
1. Ellen said CFP has some guidance, and check the retail food code. Grace said more is coming out from extensions.
 2. Julie said go to a reliable source – universities, USDA, AFDO, CFP, FDA. Don’t check on Google.
 3. Jim clarified the question is not for producers, but guidance for older Americans.
 4. Grace said most guidance is for producers, she is not aware of anything for end users like older Americans. An intern working with her found most videos on YouTube deal with food quality, not food safety or the science. The machine she purchased doesn’t have information in the manual with great detail on cleaning and sanitizing, or cross contamination. She thinks people need to put the equipment manufacturers to task, they should be the ones providing the guidance.
 5. Bambi said they often partner with ISU-Extension on issues.
- viii. Kemi asked if there are specific labeling requirements or consumer advisory requirements?
1. Julie said there are for every type of food and for every venue of sales – name/address of producer, weight, ingredients, “produced in an unlicensed residential kitchen” for cottage foods, allergen information, etc.
 - a. Jim said he has never seen allergen labeling on any freeze-dried foods.
- ix. Would freeze dried egg whites need consumer advisory?
1. Julie said she would need to do more research on this.
- e. Two slides of resources were shared, including links to DIAL’s website on cottage food and home food processing establishment templates,



FAQs and other documents. Two links to YouTube accounts were also shared.

Poll #2 – How long have you worked in food safety? The majority of responses were more than 15 years.

6. Open Discussion and Sharing of Partner Resources

- a. Luke Meier: works for North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters. They have a controlled contaminant class, held it in Altoona for contractors working on construction of restaurants and food establishments. They focus on food safety control during construction. He shared a link in the chat. The training is free for customers (8-hour awareness class). It is new and now it is held on-request or an as-needed basis.
<https://northcountrycarpenter.org/controlling-contaminants>
- b. Hannah Hansen started at ISU extension in May. She provided this link, a PCQI course co-facilitated with Dr. Dickson: [https://www.extension.iastate.edu/ag/event-details/a00UO00000FERUM2A5/FSPCA%20Preventive%20Controls%20for%20Human%20Food%20\(PCHF\)%20Version%202.0%20Participant%20Course](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/ag/event-details/a00UO00000FERUM2A5/FSPCA%20Preventive%20Controls%20for%20Human%20Food%20(PCHF)%20Version%202.0%20Participant%20Course)
- c. Kemi Oni, IHHS, said there is not much going on food-related. She mentioned their new director is getting settled in. She said freeze-drying technology is her new challenge.
- d. Tim Link, current President of IEHA and works at City of Dubuque Public Health: NEHA regional conference was held in La Crosse. There were several good retail food presentations and one on dietary supplements, featuring how supplements are being added to food in violation of FDA laws. He said it is shocking to see the health claims and what is being added.
- e. Merri asked Erin Good to introduce herself. She is a member representing the Iowa Beef Industry Council as the Director of Nutrition and Health.
- f. Thao asked Erin Dugan, FDA Emergency Response Coordinator, to provide updates. She said there are no updates, everyone is working without pay due to the shutdown. FDA has done a lot of work on 7-OH, warning letters to companies restricting them from selling this product as a dietary supplement. FDA is wanting to make that a scheduled narcotic but it is not finalized yet. FDA is starting to take action on manufacturers of this product.



7. Thao closed the meeting, informing attendees a meeting evaluation would be issued. The next General Membership meeting will be in the spring next year. She also reminded everyone the recording of the meeting would be available upon request.

Meeting Ended 3:17 pm

Merri Cross, DIAL, Task Force Advisory Board Secretary