

Development of a Tri-State Research/Outreach Food Safety Initiative

Richard Linton

Issue: It is becoming more difficult for land grant institutions to meet the research and outreach needs of stakeholder groups within their state and nationally. Decreased funding, decreased resources, and a more complex agricultural structure are all likely contributors to this problem.

Date	Activity
Fall 2010	Establish faculty leadership at each institution. A series of conference calls were conducted among the 3 universities. Richard Linton (PU), Brad Marks, (MSU), and Jeff LeJeune (OSU) agreed to represent their institution and lead the tri-state food safety effort.
Fall 2010	Collect research/outreach capabilities and food safety stakeholder needs data. Leadership from each university directed a college-wide food safety survey to identify: a) research capabilities, b) outreach capabilities, c) stakeholder interactions, and, d) integrated research/outreach needs and opportunities for the 3 state region.
Fall 2011	Propose tri-state regional food safety concept to college administration. A series of conference calls and a face-to-face meeting was held that included research and outreach administrative leadership from all 3 universities. The initial focus of these discussions was to share research and outreach capabilities, as well as common stakeholder groups, across the 3 state region. The discussion then focused on opportunities and advantages of working together and formation of a more formalized tri-state research/outreach integration initiative. Administration was very quickly “sold” on the idea, and, this promoted further discussion about how to support key issues across the region. To our surprise, administration from all 3 universities agreed to share resources and develop a memorandum of agreement and a RFP to support tri-state activities. Six areas, including food safety, were identified and 300K was allocated (100 K from each university) to support research/outreach integrated efforts.
Winter 2011	Face-to-face food safety faculty leadership meeting. In response to the RFP, a larger faculty team was assembled to write a grant to develop the “Tri-State Regional Food Safety Effort.” The leadership team comprised a total of 9 people that included a research focused faculty member, an outreach focused faculty member, and a department head from each university.
Spring 2011	Write the grant. A grant was written by the 9-member leadership team. The grant focused on 6 core objectives: Objective 1: Build 3-4 multi-institutional clusters of researchers focused on specific food safety research themes that leverage complementary expertise across the three institutions – ultimately aimed at future submission of multi-institutional research grant proposals. Objective 2: Prepare and disseminate 3-4 white papers on food safety focus areas, aimed at internal stakeholders, federal agencies, and publication in public venues. Objective 3: Develop a database of boilerplate information (e.g., facility and equipment descriptions, faculty vitae, university capacities) that can be utilized by food safety researchers building collaborative projects across the three universities. Objective 4: Foster improved communication and collaboration between academic and stakeholders in the tri-state region. This goal will be achieved by pilot testing a regional Food Safety Conference to bring together multiple partners to exchange information and ideas about stakeholder needs and academic capabilities in the broader tri-state region. Objective 5: Enhance partners’ ability to assess the significance and change resulting from outreach and engagement programs offered by our institutions. This goal will be achieved by providing a continuing education workshop to interested faculty on the topic of outcome mapping, a powerful novel method to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach activities and outputs. Objective 6: Develop a tri-state food safety website. The purpose of the newly developed website will enable us to highlight and market our inter-institutional research and outreach capabilities and to identify project offerings to our stakeholder groups. From an Extension and outreach perspective, we will collect all of our current print based educational materials and place them into this single website depository. This will allow us to be more efficient and less duplicative
Summer 2011	Establish the Tri-State Food Safety Partnership for Research and Outreach Integration. Funding for this proposal begins on September 1, 2011 and the initiation of the tri-state effort begins then. A regional food safety workshop is expected in the Spring of 2012.

Impacts/New Partnerships: The most important impact to date is to start the development of a relationship among partners in the 3 participating states and to form an interdisciplinary culture for research and outreach activities across the region. New partnerships have been developed among both faculty and administrators at Michigan State University, The Ohio State University and Purdue University. New partnerships have also been formed with industry and regulatory stakeholders throughout the region.

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life): This has been a successful and very rewarding FSLI project. Because of this project concept, we have started a new partnership/collaboration and new way of working together. We were also able to convince university administration of the value and impact of such collaborative efforts. It will be critical in the years to come to document significant research and outreach impacts and to continually foster the relationships between all 3 universities and the stakeholders that we serve.

The Experiment Station and Extension Directors from all 3 universities established a Tri-State Research/Extension Funding Program based on this FSLI project. The goal is to stimulate and develop regional efforts that provide synergy across institutions. Funding for this RFP is designed to allow each state institution to capitalize on their strengths and to build multistate teams of scientists to enhance the research and outreach capacity. Proposed research and extension projects for the RFP (<http://oardc.osu.edu/tsire/>) must: 1) Build multi-state efforts that enhance the ability of each state to address challenges and issues in agriculture and the biosciences, 2) Develop competitive teams to compete for large external agency, private industry or foundation grants, 3) Build competitive research and extension teams that have the ability to leverage these 'seed dollars' to build nationally recognized, competitive and sustainable research/extension programs, and, 4) Create outcomes and deliverables to enhance the competitiveness of research and extension programs.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?

Absolutely! The skills I learned about development of stakeholder relationships and impact of integrated research/outreach programs was invaluable for the success of my project.

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