

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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From ice cream to tattoos: Food and drug officials work to improve safety

Food and drug safety officials from the U.S. and Canada will be meeting in Pittsburgh, PA beginning June 25. Stan Stromberg, Food Safety Director for the Oklahoma Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Forestry will lead the 120th annual educational conference of the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO). AFDO has about 500 members including state and federal food safety officials in addition to manufacturers of food, drugs and medical devices. They regulate and inspect a wide variety of foods, drugs, medical devices and cosmetics.

This year's conference theme will focus attention on the need for collaboration among diverse partners in order to develop a nationally integrated food safety system. Many of the planned sessions focus on ways to implement the seven final rules published by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as part of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

"Food safety is such a big task that none of us can do it on our own," Stromberg said. Food safety in the U.S. is a complicated process involving a large amount of different foods, numerous things that can go wrong at any point in the process and millions of individual decision makers in manufacturing and retail settings.

Stromberg notes that the FDA rules set new requirements for human and animal food that help identify major risks and reduce the potential for food adulteration. Risk assessment and preventive control will be part of the safety plans that must be in place.

A nationally integrated plan will assure that state officials all have the same level of training and laboratories are working to the same standard. Stromberg believes this will eliminate duplicated efforts and repeat testing that delays food safety investigations. Beneficial results will be the ability to take action sooner when illness occurs and creating a greater level of trust between the FDA and state officials.

As AFDO President, Stromberg will urge members to support a nationally integrated food safety system and work toward implementing it as soon as possible. He admits that this is a big change for many people, but expects it to yield benefits for businesses in having more efficient operations. They will be assured that a process that passes inspection in Oklahoma will also pass inspection in any other state where the company manufactures food. More importantly, he expects consumers to benefit by having fewer outbreaks of human illness related to food products.

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Photo caption: Stan Stromberg directs the Food Safety Division of the Oklahoma Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Forestry in addition to serving as president of the Association of Food and Drug Officials meeting in Pittsburgh, PA June 25-29.