

FDA Depends on State Public Health and Agriculture Laboratories to Protect our Food Supply

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Laboratory Flexible Funding Model (LFFM) program is a critical funding source to maintain and strengthen state agriculture and public health laboratories that do food safety testing and the response networks that are key to creating an effective, integrated food safety system in the United States.

LFFM funding should increase by at least 40% to \$31 million just to keep programmatic activity even with previous years.

State laboratories provide nationwide surveillance that is far too costly for FDA to ever duplicate. Since 2020, the LFFM cooperative agreement program has provided \$23 million annually to engage the ability of state laboratories to conduct foodborne investigations by:

- Enabling faster identification and containment of foodborne outbreaks.
- Facilitating the development of new tests and DNA sequencing.
- Enhancing testing capabilities to quickly respond to emergencies.



Keeping an Eye on the Food Supply

LFFM funding has established a robust system of food testing that provides alerts about harmful biological and chemical hazards in our food supply, informs prevention strategies and mitigates risks.

Identifying Contaminated Products Before Illness Strikes

- When *Listeria* was found on peaches from grocery stores in multiple states in 2022, four states from across the country activated teams to investigate. Because of the funding and partnerships provided by the LFFM, these states were able to quickly communicate with one another, sharing vital investigation data. State investigators identified more potentially contaminated peaches, which were then removed from stores before causing any illness.
- When the February 2021 congressional report, “Baby Foods Are Tainted with Dangerous Levels of Arsenic, Lead, Cadmium, and Mercury,” was released, LFFM laboratories tested baby food to reassure families who utilized the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program that products were safe.

Controlling Outbreaks Through Genetic Links

- After *Salmonella* was found in dog food in 2023, LFFM-funded DNA sequencing showed that the strain was a close match to seven cases across seven states, with six of them affecting children under the age of one. The dog food was recalled.
- When *Listeria* was found in cotija cheese in 2023, DNA sequencing recently funded by LFFM linked it to 25 cases of illness over the past decade. Because of LFFM, in only three and a half weeks, the source causing illness from *Listeria* was identified and removed.

GenomeTrakr Network

FDA’s GenomeTrakr Network leverages the power of DNA sequencing. Participating labs collect and share genomic and geographic data from foodborne pathogens, speeding up investigations both local and nationwide. The 31 state GenomeTrakr labs are supported by LFFM.

Stepping Up to Assist FDA Investigations

- LFFM laboratories quickly responded to FDA's call to action to assist its 2023 investigation of lead and chromium in cinnamon-containing fruit purees. Laboratories collected 97 samples in four business days, testing various flavors and packaging materials to identify the issue—contaminated cinnamon.
- After three cases of Legionnaires' disease were reported on domestic cruise ships in 2021, FDA asked LFFM laboratories to provide critical support by testing for *Legionella* on the vessels, a testing capability FDA laboratories do not currently possess. States identified the source of contamination and FDA issued the company a warning letter.
- LFFM laboratories assisted FDA's 2022 investigation of *Cronobacter sakazakii* in powdered infant formula. With reports of four illnesses and two deaths of infants from *Cronobacter* infections, states analyzed 115 samples of powdered infant formula. FDA's investigation resulted in a large formula recall.

Precise and Complete Recalls

- *Listeria* has been found in multiple samples of enoki mushrooms by several LFFM laboratories; two laboratories found the pathogen in mushrooms that had not yet been recalled. Expanding the list of recalled products likely prevented additional illness.
- Following the identification of lead and chromium contamination in fruit puree pouches, multiple LFFM laboratories supported a 2024 FDA targeted lead assessment of ground cinnamon products from discount retailers. Testing by these LFFM laboratories quickly identified additional products with elevated lead levels.

FERN Laboratories: Responding to Emergencies

The Food Emergency Response Network (FERN) created state and federal response mechanisms to quickly take action during emergency situations threatening the food supply. FERN has saved lives many times over and helps preserve confidence in the food Americans eat every day. The LFFM supports FERN by ensuring state food laboratories can test for contaminants in food.

Through LFFM funding, FERN has expanded state testing for radioactive material in food from five to 18 laboratories—filling a huge resource and knowledge gap at the state level.

FDA cannot perform its role in assuring food safety without state food safety laboratories.

The LFFM is an indispensable component of FDA's work to protect the nation's food supply and a critical source of federal funding for state food safety laboratories, expanding the capacity to respond to and prevent foodborne outbreaks, strengthening laboratory networks and fortifying the larger food safety system.

While LFFM funding has remained flat since its inception, inflation and state wages have not—one state laboratory estimates that the LFFM purchasing power has declined by 40% over that time.

LFFM funding should increase by at least 40% (\$9 million) just to keep programmatic activity even with previous years.



For more information, contact **Peter Kyriacopoulos, APHL Chief Policy Officer** at 240.485.2766 or peter.kyriacopoulos@aphl.org.