



For Immediate Release

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Michigan Grocers First in Nation to Hold Food Security Exercise

May 25, 2004 (EAST LANSING, Mich.)—How would grocers, emergency response leaders and government officials react if food purchased in a Michigan grocery store was purposely contaminated and making people sick? That was the question posed on May 21 at Michigan State University's Kellogg Center during an interactive food security reality check.

Michigan grocers are the first in the nation to hold this kind of food security threat exercise to help government and industry leaders meet critical security challenges. Michigan Grocers Association was a key sponsor and organizer of the exercise. **Linda Gobler**, president of the grocers association, strongly believes in the benefit of finding effective real-world solutions for emergency response.

“In the post-September 11 world, the food industry is now on the front lines of the war on terrorism,” says Gobler. “Michigan Grocers Association—along with the Michigan Department of Agriculture’s **Dr. John Tilden**—initiated this training exercise to ensure Michigan citizens have a secure environment in which to eat, shop and work.”

More than 125 participants simulated four aspects of a grocery store-related security situation, moving through the threat, incident, response and recovery. Those involved included grocery industry representatives; local, state, and federal homeland security, food and health officials; local law enforcement and emergency first responders; public health information officers; and association staff. The Uriah Group, a security consulting company, and Michigan State University coordinated the exercise.

The results: Face-to-face communication between industry and government to find ways to improve food security measures and response. “This one-day exercise has already improved communications and relations one-hundred percent,” says Gobler.

“One of the most important aspects of food security prevention and protection—whether for industry, government or academia—is education,” says **Ed Mather**, deputy director of the National Food Safety & Toxicology Center at Michigan State University. Mather is the MSU lead on a new Department of Homeland Security Center for Food Security. “This exercise is a critical step toward minimizing suffering and damage in the event of a terrorist attack.”

It is likely that every state will want to hold exercises using the model debuted for the grocery industry in Michigan as leaders implement the new Presidential Directive – 9, which directs that a national policy be developed to protect the food system against terrorist attacks, major disasters and other emergency situations.

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“We strongly encourage the grocery industry in other states and other industries and groups in our state to hold exercises such as this, enabling them to best prevent, detect, respond to and recover from any security threat,” Gobler says.

The project was the result of a public-private partnership, bringing together the Michigan Grocers Association, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan Department of Community Health, Michigan State Police, Michigan State University, Food Marketing Institute, Food and Agriculture Information Sharing and Analysis Center, United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association and National Restaurant Association.

“Cross-agency and organization partnerships and activities like this are instrumental in further enhancing the state’s efforts to ensure safe and secure food supply,” says **Dan Wyant**, director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture. “In fact, because of this cooperative approach, Michigan is truly emerging as a national leader in proactively working to address and prevent potential threats to our food and agricultural infrastructure.”

An after-action report will be prepared within the next 60 days so that the participants can use the lessons learned to improve their ability to coordinate an effective response should an actual attack ever take place.

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