Federal funding has been crucial for laboratories in the journey towards achieving accreditation to the ISO/IEC 17025:2005 standard, which has been identified as a critical laboratory need. Accreditation ensures that laboratory testing includes detailed documentation and stronger chain of custody, invaluable assets when the laboratory becomes involved in litigation over regulatory action.

The value and importance of ISO 17025 laboratory accreditation was made abundantly clear in April 2015 when the Nebraska Department of Agriculture Food Laboratory (NDA) found a Jeni’s Splendid Ice Creams sample positive for *Listeria monocytogenes*. NDA tested the ice cream samples as part of their routine sampling plan, created in conjunction with the State MFRP and supported by FDA as part of their ISO Cooperative Agreement. Before the recall was initiated by Jeni’s, NDA received a Public Records Request for all testing information relevant to this sample from a Washington DC-based law firm hired by Jeni’s.

After the testing information was compiled, it was very straightforward to follow the sample trail through the entire testing process. Prior to ISO accreditation, results were documented, but not in the detail that is now used routinely. This includes customized forms that record temperatures, calibration and other controls required by the ISO standard. In addition, the microbiologists who analyzed this sample have had...
numerous training courses for various food pathogens and documented proficiency in analyzing for *Listeria monocytogenes*. An erroneous result would have been extremely damaging to Jeni’s financially and also to NDA’s reputation.

As the first food recall in NDA history, this was not a routine occurrence for the Food Laboratory. Possibly as a result of the recall, no human cases were recorded that matched the pattern of the *Listeria monocytogenes* type found and this is very important considering the ~20% fatality rate of this pathogen. The fact that this food recall did not involve any human cases epitomizes how FSMA is supposed to work: by preventing foodborne illness.

Through successful collaboration and teamwork, optimizing laboratory services and facilitation of the exchange of information, integration is happening, and laboratory accreditation is one of the factors enabling integration based on building a level of trust in state-derived data. There is no substitute for producing legally defensible results, and this recall made NDA realize the value of demonstrated competence. As a level of trust is being built nationally, these examples of integration will become the norm and not the celebrated exception.

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