IMPROVING MICHIGAN’S FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM: A THREE-YEAR PLAN

With food and agriculture listed as one of Michigan’s big three industries, food safety is critical to the state’s economic health. People buy Michigan food, in part, because they trust that our food supply is safe. Michigan has long been considered a national leader in food safety. Michigan is a large and diverse agricultural state providing food and dairy products for Michiganders and is a significant exporter to other states and countries.

The Food and Dairy Division at MDARD has developed a three-year plan to improve its ability to better assure Michigan’s food and dairy safety while assisting our growing food and agriculture sector with the compliance assistance they need when starting or expanding their food or dairy business.

Why do we need to make an investment now?

A number of factors have helped identify the need for shoring up the state’s food safety net. They include:

- Increased demand for compliance assistance to start and expand food and dairy businesses as our economy is growing again.
- A State Auditor General report and Food and Drug Administration Audits highlighting the lack of resources within the Food and Dairy Division to maintain adequate food safety inspection levels.
- Outdated technology that prevents staff from working more efficiently.
- Most industry fees haven’t been updated since 2000.
- Increased work in specialty program areas.

How will these changes benefit me?

- More assistance to help start or grow food businesses.
- Evaluations completed on schedule to help you be assured that your business meets food safety standards.
- Faster response to investigate and resolve business interruptions due to disasters, recalls, positive sample results and outbreaks when they occur.
- Easily apply for, renew and track your license and other interactions with MDARD on-line, including streamlining applications if you receive multiple licenses from MDARD. For example, many of our customers receive food, gas and/or plant nursery licenses.

The plan focuses on adding 20 staff positions and improving technology for customers and staff. The legislature has approved adding for the fiscal year starting October 1, 2015:

- $3.8 million over two years to MDARD’s budget to support new hardware and software that will provide a customer service portal and seamlessly combine the licensing and inspection functions across the department.
- $1.8 million to the Food and Dairy Division budget.

For years two and three, we are looking to adjust food license fees by $2.5 million so the food industry is paying its fair share (moving from 26 to 37% fee supported) of the food safety assurance cost. These funds will help fill a structural deficit in program operations, plus support additional technology needs and additional staff.