

Assessing the second annual and virtual NCR FSMA Annual Conference

RESULTS FROM THE 2020 ANNUAL CONFERENCE EVALUATION SURVEY

By Arlene Enderton and Ellen Johnsen
Iowa State University

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Executive Summary

The second annual NCR FSMA conference was originally planned for April 1 and 2 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was hosted virtually and shortened to one day.

Participants found the conference useful, especially the session on COVID-19 resources. They rated the event as relevant and had concrete ideas of how they would apply the information from the conference. The participants trust the NCR FSMA and its partners.

Although participants found the event welcoming, the virtual conference did not build relationships as effectively as an in-person meeting. Most found it hard to add to the conversation. Participants had different opinions on the platform for the meeting, with some liking Adobe Connect and others preferring a platform that allows more interaction.

The evaluation respondents had lots of ideas to discuss in future meetings.

Introduction

The North Central Region Center for FSMA Training, Extension, and Technical Assistance (NCR FSMA) formed in 2016. It is one of four regional centers tasked with organizing and equipping food safety professionals in a 12-state region to educate small-scale produce growers and processors about the federal Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) of 2011. The center was originally funded by the US Food and Drug Administration for three years. It received an additional three years of funding from the US Department of Agriculture in September 2018.

The first annual conference was held in June 2019, in Indianapolis, IN. The second annual conference was planned for April 1-2, in Eau Claire, WI. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, a virtual, one-day conference was held on April 2. This decision was made on March 12.

Methods

The one-day conference was held online using Adobe Connect on April 2, 2020. Ninety-two people participated in the conference, for at least part of the day. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Information Technology staff handled the technical aspects of the conference.

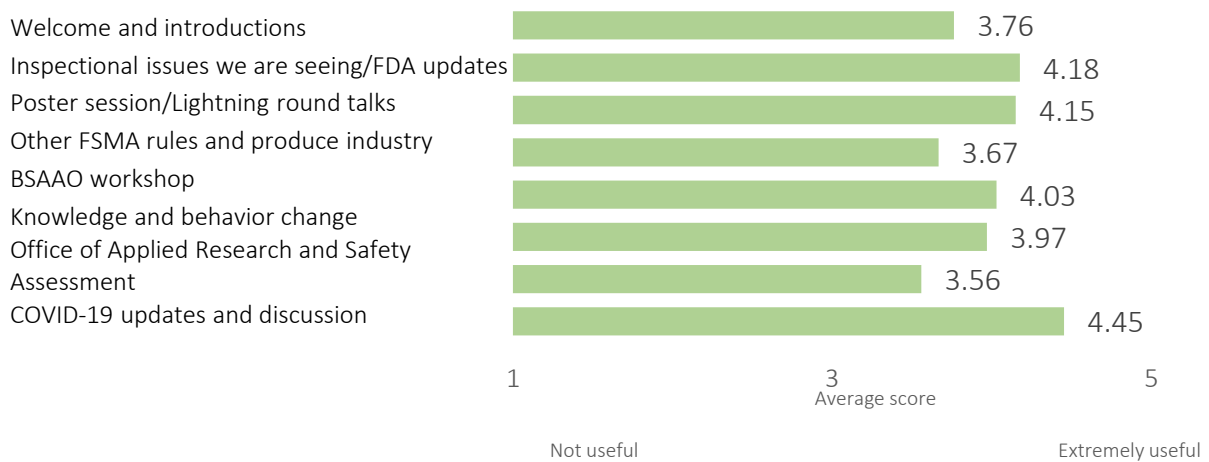
The NCR FSMA evaluator conducted an electronic evaluation survey over Qualtrics. The link was shared in the discussion box at the end of the conference and was emailed to participants the following day. Thirty-four of the 92 participants responded to the survey, for a 37% response rate.

Results

The session on COVID-19 updates and discussion was rated the most useful session. See Figure 1. The COVID-19 discussion was continued over Zoom following the end of the conference. Zoom allows for easier discussion than the Adobe platform used earlier in the day.

On a five-point scale, all sessions were rated higher than a 3.5. In addition to the most useful session, two other sessions also received a rating higher than 4.15- Inspectional Issues We Are Seeing/FDA Updates and Poster Session/Lightning Round Talks.

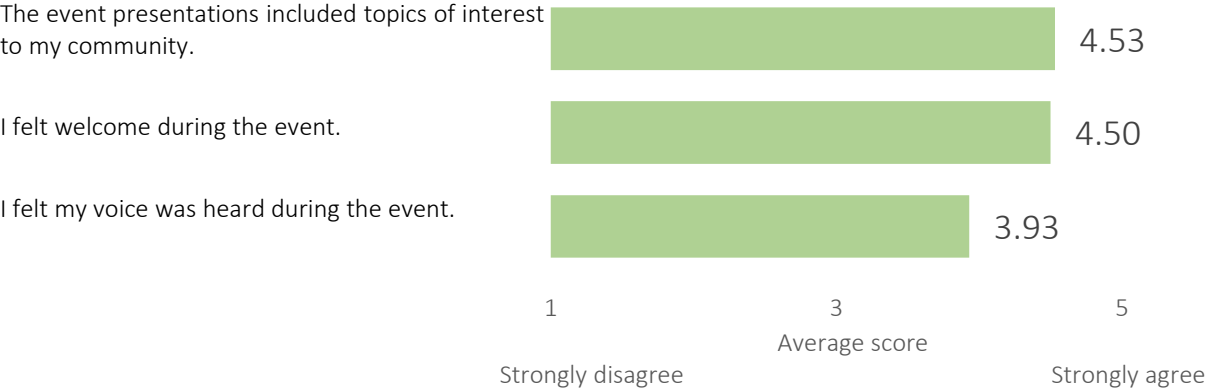
Figure 1: The session on COVID-19 was the highest rated session at the conference.



The conference included relevant topics and was welcoming, but it was hard to participate.

See Figure 2. Through open ended comments, participants said that the Adobe Connect platform limited participants’ ability to share. Only participants labeled as “presenters” were allowed to turn their microphones on and speak during the conference. Anyone else had to enter thoughts in the discussion box.

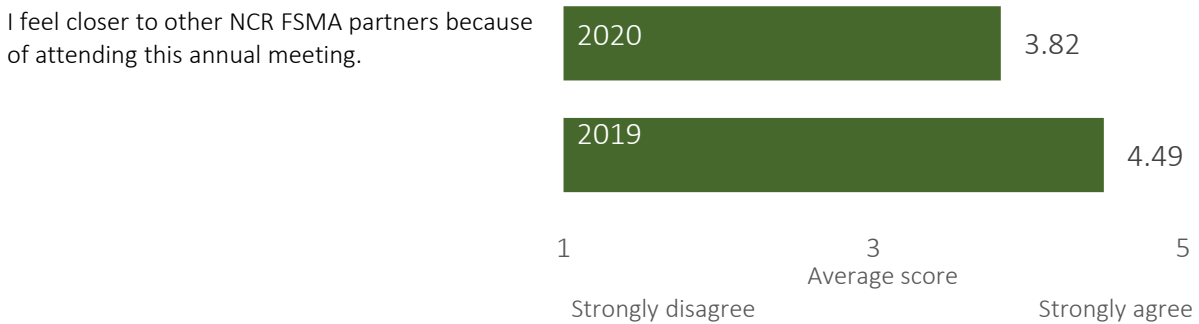
Figure 2: Participants rated the conference welcoming and relevant.



Not surprisingly, the virtual meeting did not build relationships as much as the 2019 face-to-face conference. See Figure 3.

The same question about feeling closer to NCR partners was asked following the 2019 and 2020 conferences. The average answer fell more than one-half point.

Figure 3: Participants felt closer to NCR partners after the 2019 conference than the 2020 conference.



Some participants did not like the Adobe Connect platform. Some did.

Most NCR virtual meetings (advisory board meetings, listening sessions, inspector meetings, etc.) are held using the Zoom platform. Because of the large numbers expected, this meeting was held using Adobe Connect, which was run by members of the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach IT department.

Comments from participants showed different opinions on the meeting platform:

“Wish there were breakout rooms. [There was] no way to network and [I] had to google people to figure out who they were.”

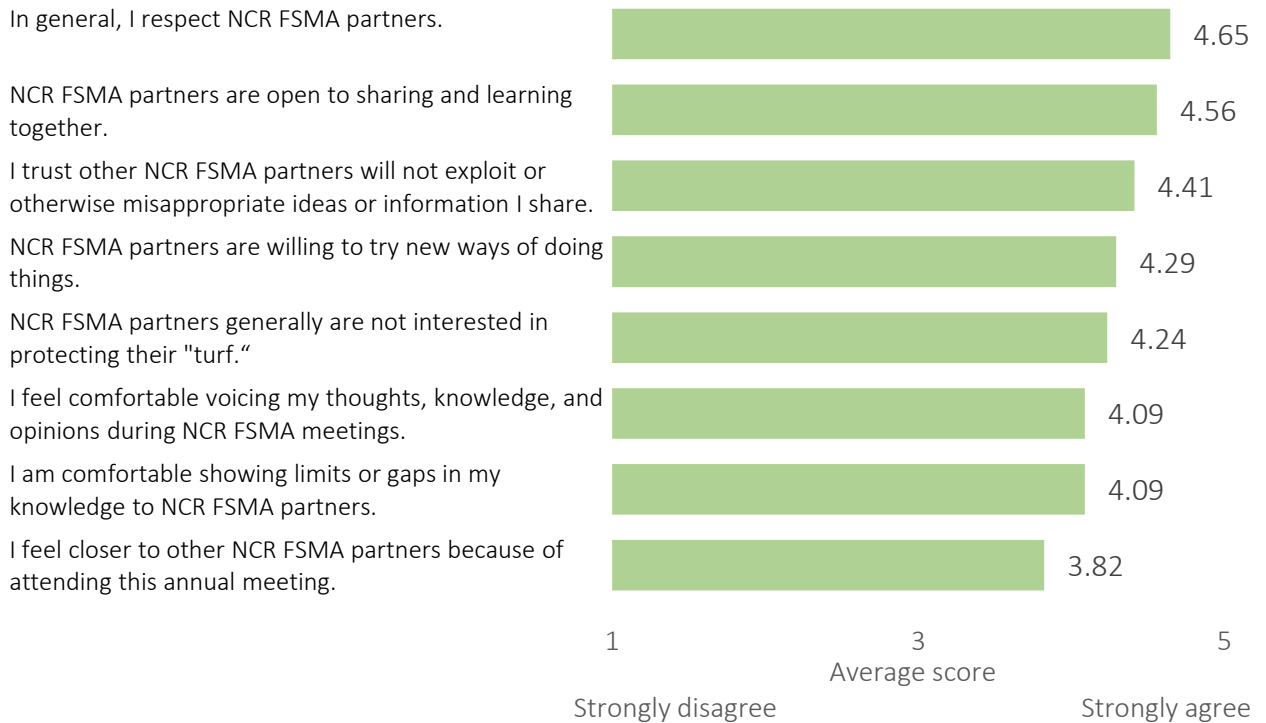
“Adobe connect platform was [bad...] Great topics but without an interactive format there were missed opportunities.”

“[It] was an introvert's dream conference.”

Trust among NCR FSMA partners remains high.

When asked if they agreed or disagreed with statements, respondents most favorably responded to the statement “In general, I respect NCR FSMA partners.” See Figure 4. The lowest response was to the statement, “I feel closer to NCR FSMA partners after attending this conference.”

Figure 4: Participants generally agreed that they respect NCR FSMA partners.



15 respondents described how they intend to apply what they learned.

Forty-four percent of respondents added comments about applying what they learned at the conference. A few are included below:

“I will apply what was presented in the survey/behavioral change [session] to future surveys I prepare and distribute.”

“[I will] engage with other states about inventory management and building. [I will] follow up with FDA for clarity on issues/questions some of their information created.”

“I already bookmarked resource pages.”

Partners want to continue learning together.

The following were suggested as topics for future webinars and discussions:

- Continue with inspection and regulatory trends.
- Inspection consistency.
- How states are determining a farm's risk level and inspection frequency.
- More about current events linked to produce safety (currently Covid-19, but also outbreaks, what's in media, etc.)
- More about validated survey tools and assistance with that validation process.
- Assessing the cleaning schedule or interval for tools and equipment. Can ATP/APC swabbing be done to assess cleaning efficacy?
- Breaking down large farm schemes and when it is a 112 and/or 117.
- How other states generate interest in On-Farm Readiness Reviews.
- Amount/type of change in farm statuses from year to year.
- State's ideal long term vision for their produce safety programs.
- Food processing is a concern in our area with both small and larger industries.
- Why aren't we switching gears from teaching grower trainings to workshops/materials on complying with the rule?

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the evaluation survey results, the conference was effective in sharing relevant information and creating trust between NCR partners. The conference was less effective at creating a sense of connection between the partners, as expected for a virtual conference. One participant summed it up, "Thank you so much for putting the virtual meeting together in such a short time. I learned a lot, but miss seeing everyone."