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In addition to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs staff, Matthew Sinn and Rosemary O’Connell from USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, also participated in this meeting.

**BACKGROUND QUESTIONS**

1. How many SFAs are there in your state?
There are 1,057 SFAs in New Jersey; 716 of them are in the NSLP (368 SFAs are under management company contracts).

2. How do you define an SFA? Is it a school district or something else?

An SFA can be a public school district, a private school, an RCCI, or a charter school.

3. When did your state begin SMI reviews?


4. Why did you begin then as opposed to earlier or later?

The staff did one-on-one technical assistance on site with each of the SFAs during the 1997–1998 school year. They wanted to get the training done before starting the actual reviews.

5. How many SMI reviews were completed in

1998–1999? 100–125 reviews (some reviews are still coming in, so the number isn’t final yet).

6. How do you define a completed review?

A completed review includes an on-site review, a nutrient analysis, an exit conference, a letter to the district, an improvement plan, and a closeout letter.

7. When do you expect to complete the first round of SMI reviews?


8. Do you think your state will need to make any changes in the future to process or staffing in order to complete the SMI reviews in five years?

The state may change staffing in the future. It would like to hire a coordinator to do all the documentation and to help identify training needs. It is also looking to add field staff.

9. Are SMI reviews done in conjunction with CRE reviews?
The same person or team does both of them together. The CRE takes one day. The SMI takes at least one day but may take more if the information from the SFA is incomplete.

10. If you do SMI reviews in conjunction with the CRE, did you have to add staff to do this? What kind of training was involved?

There was no increase in money allocated with the increased workload of SMI. New Jersey used the USDA training as well as internal training. Staff learned a lot through trial and error.

11. Do your reviewers have access to e-mail?

No. Hopefully, they will within the next year.

12. Do your reviewers have access to the Internet?

No. Hopefully, they will within the next year.

13. Is there any other software (e.g., MS Excel) that reviewers use for completing reviews? If so, what? Is the same software used at the state level and at the SFA level?

All the reviewers have Nutrikids. The state has just ordered the Windows-based version of Nutrikids for everyone.

14. How many people are involved in doing SMI reviews and analysis?

There are seven field staff members and one central office person. New Jersey also contracts with an outside vendor in Ohio. The contractor has a lead dietitian and a data entry person.

15. Where are they located? For whom do they work?

The field staff and central office person all work for the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs. The field staff are in the office one day a week. The rest of the time, they are based out of their homes and are spread out around the state. They all have nutritional backgrounds, and one is an RD. The contractor that does the analyses is located in Ohio.

16. What are each of their roles in the SMI reviews?

The field staff do the site visits and technical assistance. They hand-carry all of the information back to the office to send to the contrac-
tor. The central office person is a clerical position. She logs all of the information in to show where a review is at a given time. She also tracks all the information coming from and going to the contractor. The contractor performs the analyses.

17. Does the state agency have access to the nutrient analysis information?
Yes.

18. Do you feel that the SMI reviews are necessary to bring school meals into compliance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Recommended Daily Allowances?
No. The most common problems are that the fat levels are too high or that there are too many calories. Nothing is way out of line. The reviews give child nutrition programs credibility, but the cost/benefit analysis doesn’t work. The state could do more with the money that is currently going into the SMI. State staff should be training school food service people. Simple concepts are needed that the school food staff can understand—the nutrient analysis is too complicated. Also, it is often hard to get nutrient information from commercial vendors. If schools would just follow a meal pattern (especially an enhanced food-based program), they would serve nutritious meals.

Team Nutrition or getting parents more involved would be better than spending so much time and money on the SMI. An SFA would be foolish not to have nutritious food if it can, and most schools are really trying. SMI nutrient analyses are a paper exercise. They don’t necessarily reflect reality.

19. Do you think it would be difficult for the reviewers in this state to provide information to the FNS directly?
New Jersey would rather have the information sent from the state agency. Because an outside contractor is doing the analyses, the state would want to have the opportunity to review the information before it was sent to the FNS.

**PROCESS IN THE STATE**

1. Who collects the raw information for nutrient analyses on food offered in any given SFA?
The field staff collect the information. First, they conduct training for all SFAs that are going to be reviewed. The SFAs are told what information to have available, and they are given sample documents. The field staff members determine the review week and let the SFA know the date. They collect the backup information during the site visit.

2. With what organization is this person employed?

The reviewers all work for the Department of Agriculture.

3. In what format is the information collected? Does this format change over the course of the review? For example, if the initial information is collected on hard copy, is it ever converted to an electronic version?

Everything is on hard copy.

4. Who performs the nutrient analysis of this information?

The contractor in Ohio performs all nutrient analyses.

5. Are there any steps between the initial collection of information and the nutrient analysis? If so, what are they and who performs them?

During the site visit, the field staff and the SFA people do all the paperwork, so that they have all the menus, recipes, and production records for the analysis. That eliminates most of the need to go back to the SFA for more information, although additional information may be required later.

6. Is the nutrient analysis ever revised after it is initially performed? If so, when and by whom? Where is the revision information recorded?

If something is wrong with the analysis, staff will have to get more information from the SFA and redo it.

7. How often are nutrient analyses usually revised?

Rarely.

8. Are data elements ever added or deleted from the information during this process?

No.
9. Is the information aggregated in some way other than at the state level? For example, at a district or regional level? If so, at what level?

So far, there is no aggregation. The state would like to build some sort of database for use in aggregation, but it is waiting to see what FNS reporting mandates will be.

10. Where are SFA-level records kept and in what format?

They are all kept in the state office in Trenton. Everything is on hard copy.

11. When is the information sent to the state and by whom?

The contractor sends the analyses back to the state within 20 days of receiving the backup information. Usually, two or three analyses will be grouped together when they are sent back.

12. How is the information sent to the state? Electronically? Hard copy? If electronically, please describe the protocols used. For example, is the information recorded on a diskette? Sent by e-mail? Other?

Everything is sent to the state on hard copy.

13. Where is the information kept and in what format? If applicable, please give a name and telephone number for the person who would have this information at the state level.

Everything is kept at the state on hard copy. The department would like to keep things in electronic format but hasn’t been able to so far because it had to make Y2K compliance a priority.

14. Does the state do an independent nutrient analysis for SMI reviews, or does the state review existing analyses, or both? In which cases does the state do independent reviews? In which cases does the state review nutrient analyses performed elsewhere? (Keep in mind that it is possible for the state to do both if it reviews nutrient analyses done by an SFA using a NuMenus or Assisted NuMenus system but does the actual nutrient analyses for SFAs using food-based systems.)

There are 23 SFAs in the state doing nutrient standard menu planning (NSMP), mostly using management companies, and one doing
assisted NSMP, also using a management company. The state reviews their analyses every year, whether or not they are selected for review. In review years, the NSMP schools have to submit the backup, but it is not sent to the contractor for a new analysis. For schools on other meal plans, the contractor does the analysis.

15. At what point would it be best to have the nutrient analysis information sent to the FNS? From the state? From the reviewers themselves? Why?

The information should come from the state because it is ultimately responsible. The FNS should provide the software to do the reports and the state staff will submit the necessary information. The state does not want to waste time capturing information that it doesn’t need. The software should allow the state access to the data as well as give it a way to send the information to the FNS.

16. Which of these steps, if any, would need to change in order to meet the FNS’s goals for the selected data elements being sent in electronic format?

Nothing would really need to change in the review process. The state collects what needs to be reported.

17. It is possible that, in the future, the FNS may be able to negotiate with the companies that have created the nutrient analysis software to add a function where you would be able to create the report for the FNS right from the software. If that were to happen, what changes would you need to make to your current procedure?

Information should still go through the state rather than directly from the contractor, so this would only be useful if the contractor could send the information to the state and the state could forward it to the FNS.

18. Which of the required data elements are currently missing from the software package you are using for your nutrient analyses?

Only the information directly from the nutrient analyses is currently in Nutrikids. Everything else would have to be added.
19. If the software companies do not agree to add this function, how will you incorporate the additional elements into an electronic report for the FNS?

The state wants a protocol from the FNS for doing the reports.

20. Do you think that there are any data elements that should be added to or deleted from the list to send to the FNS? If so, which items and why?

See comments with data elements.

21. Do you have any opinion on sending the information to the FNS electronically? Will this create any problems for your state?

It is no problem to report to the FNS electronically if the FNS provides a protocol for the required data elements. Otherwise, the state would have to create a method to do this.

22. How often do you think the states should have to report this information to the FNS? The FNS is required to prepare an annual strategic plan. Therefore, it is leaning toward annual collection of this information. Would this cause problems for your state?

If states have the software from the FNS and they are entering the information into the database regularly, they could send the information as often as the FNS wanted. Annually would be fine, but they could also do it quarterly or even monthly.

23. Can you think of any alternatives for any of the processes we have discussed so far?

No.

24. The FNS would like us to solicit comments from the state about this process. Do you have anything that you would like us to pass on to them?

There is an easier way to do this. The money should be put into programs such as the Deal-a-Meal program or Trimming the Fat. This would serve a better purpose than SMI monitoring. It is true that an SFA can't improve if it doesn't know what its baseline is. However, if an SFA had some sort of average profile of meals to follow, it would make more sense than SMI. It is still too early to see
anything in the SMI data. New Jersey will have more faith in the data after it has gone through the cycle once or twice. The FNS should try out the reporting with a few volunteers on an informal basis before requiring it of all states.

**DATA ELEMENTS**

Based on comments from Matt Sinn, the group decided that the following data elements would be necessary for any report to the FNS:

1. Unique reference code
2. Contact person
3. Contact person’s phone number
4. Type of SFA
5. Menu planning system used
6. Analyze lunch only or lunch and breakfast
7. Analysis weighted?
8. Lowest grade and age range
9. Highest grade and age range
10. Analysis done by grade or age range
11. Average daily number of lunches
12. Actual content from analysis software (11 nutrients)
13. Comments.

In addition, there would be space for some option items, such as name of the SFA. The contact person could be the state director for all analyses if that is what the state wanted. The standards could be given once for every age and grade range. New Jersey is already collecting all of this information, so it would not be a problem to report it if the FNS provided a protocol.