

NSF International Food Safety Award Nomination – Tara Hluchy (AB)

The Calgary and Central zones in Alberta became a sentinel site for FoodNet Canada in August 2014. This assignment created the largest of all the sentinel sites with more than half of the country's data originating from this site! Serving a population of over one million people, this sentinel site conducts approximately 800 enteric surveys annually.

The FoodNet surveillance program includes information from enteric investigations, retail food outlets, drinking water, farms and private laboratory's. The information is analysed by FoodNet Canada and any potential links are identified and reported to public health teams.

At the beginning of 2016, Tara Hluchy was charged with leading the program at the local level. This meant ensuring quality information was gathered and reported from both Calgary and Central zones. Over the last few years Tara has gone above and beyond her role by improving the communication between the two zones and the Public Health Agency of Canada, ensuring that each party is aware of potential results or issues, and always make certain that everyone has input into the system regarding potential improvements. One such improvement that Tara was responsible for was the recent change made to the enteric questionnaire. This change has improved the flow of the questionnaire and removed portions that are not required, for instance if the illness is connected to travel. This has improved efficiencies for staff completing the investigations.

Moreover, Alberta has been dealing with a number of E. Coli O157:H7 outbreaks related to pork products over the last 4 years. As a result of her commitment to public health outcomes, Tara suggested including additional retail sampling of local pork sausages from local farmers markets to look for further linkages to enteric illness. The FoodNet samples also encompass our partners within Alberta Agriculture who Tara works closely with. Tara is always first to contact the pertinent collaborative agencies and make sure that they are aware of results that show any potential links between illness and product, and then brainstorm with them on next steps. A recent example is a cluster of E. Coli O26 cases that have been linked to an irrigation canal water sample by Whole Genome Sequencing. Tara has the team excited to do further follow up in this area.