

**Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Defense Task Force
Food Innovation Team Subcommittee**

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Title: Minnesota Food Safety & Defense Task Force - Food Innovation Team	

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1. PURPOSE

This procedure describes the process used to implement the Food Innovation Team (FIT), a subcommittee of the Minnesota Food Safety & Defense Task Force (FSDTF).

2. SCOPE

This procedure applies to FIT members, FSDTF members, staff of the Food and Feed Safety Division (FFSD) of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), and others as defined in Section 6 – Responsibility.

3. BACKGROUND

Most food businesses in Minnesota receive a license to do business from the MDA, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), or their delegated agencies (DAs) with relative ease. However, some food business owners (FBOs) may encounter delays in licensing, or determination of exemption or exclusion from licensing due to a number of factors that may not be easily solved without assistance. The FSDTF is statutorily responsible (MN Statute 28A.21) for a number of duties related to assisting FBOs including providing advice and coordination to state agencies and serving as a source of information and referral for the public concerned with food safety. The FSDTF created FIT to help answer questions and assist FBOs in navigating Minnesota’s food licensing and regulatory environment. A further goal of FIT is the development of case documents for educational purposes. Understanding interpretations of statute and rule, and reasoning used in resolving a case, helps those who advise FBOs to be more effective and accurate in their advice.

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4. DEFINITIONS

Data Privacy Tennessee Warning – The Food Innovation Team (FIT) regularly requests data from food business owners (FBOs) interested in participating or gaining food business licensing guidance from FIT through the Pre-Screening Intake Form (PSIF), during FIT meeting proceedings, and as part of the regular processes of FIT. The information provided for these FIT activities will be used before, during, and after FIT meetings to answer licensing questions from FBOs. Information provided is public information and will be discussed at a meeting that is open to the public. If you have information that you want protected, please contact the Food and Feed Safety Division Director, Katherine Simon (katherine.simon@state.mn.us or (651) 201-6596) before filling out this form and submitting it to FIT.

Exclusion of Liability Statement - The report generated is a non-binding review by the FIT Subcommittee; it is the role of the jurisdictional regulatory body to determine next steps for the FBO. Neither the FIT Subcommittee nor the FSDTF are the final decision maker regarding the future of a case. FSDTF and its subcommittees are advisory bodies only. The job of the FIT Subcommittee is to aid FBOs with complex questions as they relate to licensing, and offer suggestions based on members' experience and expertise. The FSDTF and its subcommittees do not have any enforcement or regulatory authority and are not liable for any issues or consequences arising out of the use of the FSDTF or any subcommittees thereof.

5. ACRONYMS

DA – Delegated Agency

FBO - Food Business Owner

FFSD – Food and Feed Safety Division of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture

FIT - Food Innovation Team

FSDTF – Food Safety and Defense Task Force

PSIF - Pre-Screening Intake Form

MDA – Minnesota Department of Agriculture

MDH – Minnesota Department of Health

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6. RESPONSIBILITY

The roles defined in this section are in reference to and are further described in the Procedures section below.

FIT Membership - may ask a Food Business Owner (FBO) to fill out the Pre-Screening Intake Form (PSIF) to start the data collection process. FIT members will contribute to the finalization of FIT meeting agendas, request the presence of ad-hoc experts to assist in answering questions during meetings, make recommendations to the FSDTF regarding applicants for FIT membership, aid the FIT Chair in reviewing and generating reports, and aid the FIT Chair in establishing a reasonable case review timeline.

FIT Chair – will facilitate the discussion during a FIT meeting and ensure data is collected and recorded in an appropriate repository. The FIT Chair will also ensure that individuals participating in FIT (including in FIT meetings) are aware of the Data Privacy Warning for information that is shared and the Exclusion of Liability statement regarding outcomes. The FIT Chair is responsible for developing agendas, distributing reports to interested parties, and scheduling FIT meetings.

FIT Meeting Attendees & Ad-Hoc Experts – may be called upon on occasion to help clarify food safety issues. Meeting attendees and ad hoc experts will be made aware of the Data Privacy Warning for information that is shared in the FIT process, and the Exclusion of Liability statement regarding outcomes.

FSDTF Chairs – will communicate vacancies in FIT to applicable entities and will approve new or returning FIT members.

FSDTF Membership – serve as advisory body for FIT, make recommendations as necessary to the Governor’s office.

MDA Food & Feed Safety Director or Designee – may request the presence of an ad-hoc expert(s) in FIT meetings on behalf of MDA, MDH, or DAs. Will convene FIT meetings on behalf of MDA, MDH, or DAs (upon their request) and aid the FIT Chair in developing the agenda. Will facilitate staff availability to assist in generating and distributing recommendation reports, aid the FIT Chair in developing a timeline, and will provide available resources necessary to accomplish this task. Will maintain FIT content

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on the FSDTF website including meeting announcements, posting of agendas and minutes, and publishing updated documents and reports.

MDA/MDH/DA Supervisors - may ask a FBO to fill out the PSIF to start the data collection process.

Members of Food Producer and Maker Organizations - members of organizations may ask a food business owner to fill out the PSIF to start the data collection process.

FBO - may request their case be heard at a FIT meeting after working with a regulatory agency. The FBO may request the presence of a particular ad hoc expert or individual(s) to be present during the FIT meeting.

7. PROCEDURES

7.1 Membership

- 7.1.1 If no current FIT members exist, candidates will be recommended and screened by the FSDTF chairs.
- 7.1.2 Membership will be approved by the chairs of the FSDTF.
- 7.1.3 When vacancies occur, individuals interested in becoming a FIT member will fill out a membership application. Applications will be reviewed by the FSDTF chairs.
- 7.1.4 Candidates may be recommended by current FIT members.
- 7.1.5 FIT members must fit these categories:
 - 7.1.5.1 MDA staff (1)
 - 7.1.5.2 MDH staff (1)
 - 7.1.5.3 MDA DA staff (1)
 - 7.1.5.4 MDH DA staff (1)
 - 7.1.5.5 Local food maker community (1)
 - 7.1.5.6 Local food farming community (1)
 - 7.1.5.7 Local/regional food systems expert or college/university-based (1)
 - 7.1.5.8 Food safety expert, non-agency (1)
- 7.1.6 FIT members receive no compensation
- 7.1.7 FIT members serve for two years. FIT members may re-apply for additional consecutive or non-consecutive two-year terms.

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7.1.8 FIT members may nominate themselves or another FIT member for the FIT Chair. Members will approve on a majority vote every two years or as necessary due to a vacancy.

7.1.8.1 The FIT Chair will serve for a two-year term and may serve additional consecutive or non-consecutive two-year terms.

7.1.9 FIT members may nominate themselves or another FIT member for Vice Chair. Members may approve on a majority vote every two years or as necessary due to a vacancy.

7.1.9.1 The Vice Chair will serve for a two-year term and may serve additional consecutive or non-consecutive two-year terms.

7.1.9.2 The Vice Chair will take on duties of the FIT Chair in their absence.

7.2 Case and After Action Review Intake

7.2.1 Case and After Action review criteria

7.2.1.1 When an FBO has been working with a licensing agency and has encountered a barrier to licensing, or to operating with an exemption or exclusion from licensing, the FBO may submit a request to the FFSD Director or their designee to have FIT review the case in an attempt to clarify regulatory requirements and assist in identifying potential resolutions.

7.2.1.2 The FBO will fill out a PSIF (which will include the Data Privacy Warning about the data they choose to provide and the Exclusion of Liability statement about the potential outcomes) with assistance from a FIT member. The information on the PSIF contains details about their business model and product process.

7.2.2 Case and After Action review submission

7.2.2.1 The FBOs may submit a case for review or for After Action review directly to the FFSD Director or their designee, or through a FIT member. Submitted cases will be forwarded to the FIT Chair and the FFSD Director or their designee.

7.2.2.2 MDA, MDH, or DAs may request a case for review or After Action review by FIT to discuss and clarify complex regulatory situations.

7.2.3 Case acceptance

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- 7.2.3.1 The FFSD Director or their designee and the FIT Chair will review the PSIF for completion and for meeting case criteria as described in 7.2.1.1.
- 7.2.3.2 If there is disagreement about whether a case qualifies as a FIT case, the FIT Chair and the FFSD Director or designee may consult with other FIT members for input.
- 7.2.3.3 Accepted cases will be added to the agenda for a FIT meeting.
- 7.2.3.4 The FBO will be contacted within two weeks to notify the FBO of a scheduled FIT meeting.
- 7.2.3.5 The PSIF will be used to develop an agenda as described in Section 7.3.
- 7.2.3.6 Data collected using the PSIF will be recorded for future reference and analysis.

7.3 Agenda Development

- 7.3.1 A FIT meeting will be scheduled for no later than three weeks after contacting the FBO. This timeline may be waived by the FBO to accommodate their schedule.
- 7.3.2 If too many FIT cases are submitted to be heard in a single FIT meeting, cases may be moved to a following meeting at the discretion of the FIT Chair and the MDA FFSD Director or designee.

7.4 Meeting Logistics

- 7.4.1 Since FIT meetings are open to the public, an announcement of an upcoming FIT meeting will be made via approved channels, including the FSDTF website.
- 7.4.2 FIT meetings may take place in person or via conference call or web-enabled video call.

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7.4.3 The FBO or FIT members may request to the FIT Chair that an ad hoc expert attend a particular meeting.

7.4.3.1 A list of ad hoc experts from each meeting will be maintained by the FIT to refer to for future meetings when their expertise is needed.

7.5 Data Privacy

7.5.1 Anything discussed during a FIT meeting would be subject to open meetings laws and will be open to the public. Note that recipes are not needed by FIT in most circumstances. If for any reason the recipe for a particular food product is needed, the recipe will not be recorded.

7.5.2 Those attending a FIT meeting (members of the FIT, regulators present, ad-hoc meeting attendees present, and any others) will be required to sign-in, either in print or electronically.

7.5.2.1 If a meeting is held virtually or is a hybrid in-person and virtual meeting, individuals attending virtually will sign in via the virtual platform's chat or comment feature.

7.5.3 All involved parties in FIT, the FBO, and meeting attendees will be provided with a Data Privacy Tennessee Warning that informs the person that any information they choose to share will be used and shared with those that are involved in the FIT process and are public records.

7.5.4 All involved parties in FIT, the FBO and meeting attendees will be provided with the Exclusion of Liability statement that informs the persons that a FIT case review does not guarantee licensing or any other specific outcome.

7.6 Case Reports and After Action Reports

7.6.1 At the conclusion of a FIT meeting, a Case Report or After Action Report will be generated by the FIT chair (with assistance from other FIT members and FFSD Director's staff).

7.6.2 The Task Force will then review and discuss the report.

7.6.2.1 The FIT chair or designee will provide a summary of the case and any recommendations at the Task Force meeting.

7.6.2.2 A FSDTF chair will then open the floor to discussion of the case and any recommendations.

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- 7.6.2.3 FSDTF members can propose any further actions to be taken by the Task Force, including but not limited to creating an ad hoc subcommittee to explore further actions, sponsoring education, and training opportunities, or making recommendations for changes to Minnesota laws.
- 7.6.2.4 The report findings will be used to identify trends, information gaps, and to identify training needs that the FSDTF may help to provide.
- 7.6.3 The report will be sent by the FIT chair to the FBO within two weeks of the FIT meeting.
- 7.6.4 The report will be sent by the FIT chair (with assistance from other FIT members and FFSD Director's staff) to the various regulatory agencies and organizations that participated in the FIT meeting.
- 7.6.5 The information in the report will be used to build a database/repository for future reference.
- 7.6.6 The information in the report may be used to develop guidance documents for reference by FBOs.
- 7.6.7 The nature of the recommendations included in the Case Report or After Action review may include the following:
 - 7.6.7.1 FIT may suggest modifications to a FBOs business model in keeping with safe food practices. Regulatory agencies will only participate in these types of discussions if allowed by their internal policies.
 - 7.6.7.2 FIT may suggest or request interpretations of Minnesota Statute or Rule.
 - 7.6.7.3 FIT may suggest changes to Minnesota Statute or Rule to the FSDTF.
 - 7.6.7.4 FIT may recommend business resources to the FBO.
 - 7.6.7.5 FIT operates in an advisory capacity only. A FIT meeting does not guarantee licensing or determine if or when a specific license may be issued.

8. RELATED DOCUMENTS (includes References, Attachments)

Attachment 1: Data Privacy Tennessee Warning and Exclusion of Liability Statement
Attachment 2: Pre-Screening Intake Form

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- Attachment 3: FIT Membership Application
- Attachment 4: FIT Meeting Sign-In Sheet
- Attachment 5: FIT Case Report Template
- Attachment 6: FIT After Action Report Template

9. EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS NEEDED

N/A

10. SAFETY

N/A

11. CIRCULATION

This document will be circulated to the following: MDA FFSD Division Director and applicable FFSD staff; MDH Food, Pools, and Lodging Division Director and applicable MDH staff; FSDTF members; and FIT members. The current version will be stored electronically on the FFSD document control site and a current copy will be maintained on the FSDTF website.

APPROVAL/DOCUMENT HISTORY

Document History		
Version #	Status (I, R)	Change History
1	I	Updated section 7.4.3 meeting logistics, and section 7.7.1 timeline for case review.
1.2	R	Updated section 7.6 recommendation reports. Updated section 3 to include determination of exclusion or exemption from licensing.
1.3	R	Updated the Definitions and Responsibility sections. Significantly changed section 7.2 Meetings to 7.2 Case and After Action Review Intake. Section 7.3 Agenda Development was updated and parts of section 7.7 Timeline for case review were moved up to other sections.
1.4	R	Updated item 3, Background to clarify dual role of FIT. Updated item 5, Acronyms and item 6, Responsibility to delete mention of specific non-governmental organizations. Changed 7.1 to allow for re-constituting FIT after a lapse in membership and to state FIT members may serve additional two-year terms.

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		Significantly changed sections 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 to decouple FIT meetings from FSDTF meetings and remove wording about regular meetings, to change FIT to an as-needed basis. Changed section 7.5 to clarify sign-in procedure for virtual or hybrid meetings. Changed section 7.6 to add further clarification of the advisory-only nature of FIT.
Approved By:		Date:
FSDTF Membership		10/23/2025