ORA Data Exchange (DX)

Coffee Talk with Phillip Fruechting

PFP IT WG Co-Chair and

Public Health Section Chief II, Arkansas Department of Health (ADH)

The Partnership for Food Protection (PFP) Information Technology Workgroup (IT WG) recently had an opportunity to catch-up with Phillip Fruechting, for a Coffee Talk about the Office of Regulatory Affairs Data Exchange (ORA DX).

Hello Phillip, tell us about yourself, your job role, and your involvement with the ORA DX Program.

I began my regulatory career conducting retail food inspections as a Registered Sanitarian for the City of Dallas, Texas. After leaving Dallas, I worked as a Registered Sanitarian inspecting food service establishments and swimming pools for the City of McKinney, Texas. In 2015, our food programs began conducting regulatory inspections using the electronic system USAFoodSafety. I was invited to become a member of the PFP IT WG in August of 2015.

In your role as Co-Chair of the PFP IT WG and a DX participant, what do you think are some of the benefits or advantages of participating in the ORA DX, that you would like to share with the states you support?

A benefit of participating in the ORA DX is that it will eliminate the need for states to log-in and enter firm/inspectional data on two systems, FDA system and state system. Data sharing can be completed through the state system the state inspector uses on a daily basis. Also, it helps both state and FDA programs, by having the ability to submit and review inspectional data in real time.

In 2017, Arkansas was one of the first states to come on board with the DX. What lessons learned would you like to share from your many years of experience with the DX?

I would encourage any state thinking about participating in the ORA DX to work with FDA to implement data sharing if it is possible to do so. The state's program management should be prepared and get permission from their management and information technology (IT). Agreements will be required from FDA before a state can participate in the ORA DX. Successful implementation is a process that will take time and resources. States need to budget and plan for any costs that may be associated with IT implementation and support.

Currently, Arkansas is on board for System-to-System (aka NFSDX) capabilities such as Firm Search, State-to-State, and Partners Portal capabilities such as Firm Search and Firm History, also planning to use System-to-System Contracted Inspection soon. Would you share with us the Arkansas Department of Health's experience using these capabilities?

Overall, it has been a good experience. This would not have been accomplished without the cooperation of our various partners. We have had great support from FDA's ORA DX teams, the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO), our USAFoodSafety vendor, and other state programs.

Looking ahead, are there any capabilities or enhancements you would like to see within the ORA DX?

I know FDA is working on expanding shared data sets with regulatory partners including inventory reconciliation between FDA and regulatory partners. Currently, nothing comes to mind. I just look forward to seeing the new features as they become available to states.

Please note, the Inventory reconciliation capability was released in January 2022.

How can states and the ORA DX continue to work together to ensure successful data sharing?

A state needs to be able to demonstrate to the public that the time and resources invested were worth the effort. The processes and systems need to be easy to use and enhance productivity for all parties at the same time, keeping data and systems secured.

I think Jennifer Pierquet (AFDO) has a good idea regarding creating specific user groups for the states that have experience with the DX. I think this would help to maintain and advance system performance down the road.

I encourage states to reach out to FDA if they would like to see specific system improvements. I recommend taking advantage of opportunities for staff to get involved in any user or working groups related to ORA DX.

When I first joined the PFP IT WG, I think there were five states in the group. Now, many states are participating in ORA DX via the Partners Portal, System-to-System or PFP IT or Sample WG.

Phillip you've been a part of the PFP IT WG since the initial development of the ORA DX. We certainly have come a long way! Currently, we have 48 states participating in the ORA DX.

Would you share your insight about the ORA DX onboarding experience with the state(s) you support (e.g., the state experienced delay with development during the pandemic)?

Implementation is a process that will take time to achieve. Getting started with the needed documents (ISA, MOU, and 20.88) can take a while.

From my experience with installing, upgrading, testing, and onboarding electronic type systems, I am reminded of the phrase "hurry up and wait." I think we were first starting to test sending contract inspection data and my staff brought up the need to send multiple Program Assignment Codes (PACs). The receiving system was not able to accept multiples at that time. So, it has taken a while for this to be corrected and then tested before it is in production.

I think once states get the ability to start sending contract inspection data and it is functioning, other states should benefit from the lessons learned. As the data sharing

capabilities are developed and enhanced, it would be of value to the states to provide input to FDA to avoid delays in the system usage.

Thank you for your feedback Phillip. The ORA DX program strives to be responsive to states needs and to ensure any delays that impact the states are clearly understood and resolved as quickly as possible.

The PFP IT WG would like to thank Phillip Fruechting for his support of the ORA DX program and the PFP. We look forward to continued collaboration with Phillip and expanding the ORA DX program.

For questions or information about the ORA DX program or the PFP IT WG, contact us at appsdesk@fda.hhs.gov.

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