

Counter-Terrorism Food Emergency Response Network (FERN)

What is the FERN?

FERN is a network of state and federal laboratories that are committed to analyzing food samples in the event of a biological, chemical, or radiological terrorist attack in this country. The federal partners in the FERN are the FDA, USDA, CDC and EPA. The biological section of the FERN has some overlap with the CDC's Laboratory Response Network (LRN).

The LRN is a network of state/government public health laboratories developed to provide surge capacity for samples resulting from a public health emergency caused by a select agent. FERN biological laboratory network members performing select agent analysis will also have to become members of the LRN.

Membership into the LRN includes:

- ❖ The laboratory registering with the CDC to work with select agents
- ❖ The laboratory having the appropriate facilities and equipment to work with select agents.
- ❖ Training laboratory personnel in appropriate methods to work with select agents
- ❖ Completion of a due-diligence checklist by the laboratory.

Who is participating in the FERN?

The FERN consists of federal laboratories and state public health, agriculture (food), and veterinary diagnostic laboratories. As of May 2003, the participating labs represent 27 states from across the country. The FERN project coordinators are currently developing the chemical and radiological laboratory networks and hope to have laboratories in each state capable of analyzing biological, chemical, and radiological agents participating in the network in the near future.

How is this project being funded?

Funds to support this project are primarily from federal sources. The FDA hopes to provide funds to the state laboratories through grants and cooperative agreements.

Current FERN activities (as of March 2003):

Currently, the FERN project coordinators are working to get additional state laboratories entered into the LRN and qualified for FERN membership. We are developing short and long term training plans. We are developing surveillance and proficiency sampling programs for all areas (biological, chemical and radiological). We are providing training to federal and state analysts on select agent methods.

Future FERN activities:

In the near future, the FERN project coordinators hope to develop agreements with state laboratories concerning surveillance sample analysis of food, provide more money for states through grants and cooperative agreements, continue training efforts in all areas, and to increase laboratory capabilities to allow labs to function 24/7 for 2-6 weeks at a time.

Who are the FERN contacts?

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