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# Manufactured Food Program Annual Report

2025 Annual Report

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## Program Purpose

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)’s Manufactured Food Program (MFP) exists to ensure that the food Minnesotans and consumers across the world eat is safe, accurately labeled, and produced in facilities that follow good manufacturing practices. In doing so, we advance the MDA’s mission to enhance all Minnesotans’ quality of life by protecting the integrity of the food supply, supporting a resilient agricultural economy, and promoting public health.

The MFP partners with over 2,000 food manufacturers and warehouses across the state, from small, family-owned businesses to large commercial multinational operations, providing guidance, inspections, and licensing support to help them meet state and federal safety standards for the wholesale production and distribution of food. Our work is rooted in education, transparency, and risk-based approaches that encourage voluntary compliance while maintaining accountability.

Our efforts reflect the core functions and principles of the Food and Feed Safety Division: we maintain accurate inventories of regulated entities, assess conformance to regulatory standards, respond to food safety incidents, and administer enforcement when needed. We engage with industry, regulatory partners, and the public collaboratively, fostering continuous improvement and equitable outcomes in all we do.

This past year, the MFP emphasized being a partner as well as a regulator, helping food businesses understand *why* food safety matters, using data to improve services, and supporting the growth of a safe, thriving food industry in Minnesota.

## Program Goals and Objectives

During the past year, the MFP advanced its mission to protect consumers while supporting a safe, resilient, and compliant food manufacturing industry. Program goals focused on modernizing regulatory systems, strengthening consistency and accountability, and investing in a highly skilled workforce. Together, these objectives support continuous improvement in food safety outcomes across Minnesota.

### **Goal 1: Modernizing and clarifying regulatory requirements**

The MFP sought to improve transparency and accessibility of regulatory expectations for both new and existing food manufacturers. Objectives included developing clear guidance for complex processes, such as acidified food production, and improving public-facing licensing information to help firms understand requirements and navigate the licensing process efficiently by updating public-facing licensing web content. Another objective was to implement a risk-based inspection planning and monitoring process that includes routine supervisory review, with evaluation of monthly performance reports to track inspection timeliness and coverage for high-risk facilities statewide. The program's stretch goal was to complete 95% of high-risk manufactured food inspections within required timeframes, as tracked through the inspection database.

To strengthen food safety outcomes statewide, the program prioritized consistent, risk-based inspection planning and enhanced supervisory oversight. Objectives included completing high-risk inspections on schedule, improving data use for inspection monitoring, and reinforcing consistent expectations across regions and facility types.

### **Goal 2: Skilled staff and stronger external partnerships**

Recognizing that program effectiveness depends on staff education, the MFP invested in training, technical proficiency, and leadership development. Objectives included increasing the number of staff receiving Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-specialized training and expanding internal capacity through developing instructors by supporting at least two staff to complete instructor-level training to expand in-house expertise and reducing reliance on external resources.

These goals reflect the MFP's commitment to using education, data, and modernized systems to protect public health while supporting a strong and compliant food manufacturing sector.

## Program Impact

In FY25, the MFP made measurable progress toward its goals, strengthening food safety protections, improving regulatory consistency, and supporting Minnesota's food manufacturers through assessment, enforcement, licensing, and outreach activities.

### **Goal 1: Modernizing and clarifying regulatory requirements**

**Outcome: Clearer requirements and more efficient licensing**

Guidance development and licensing process improvements directly supported firms' understanding of regulatory expectations. Over 150 new food manufacturer licenses were issued during the fiscal year. Newly developed guidance documents, particularly for acidified foods and licensing requirements, improved transparency, reduced processing delays, and helped applicants better prepare for compliance before operations began.

#### **Outcome: Consistent, risk-based oversight**

The MFP completed more than 1,300 inspections statewide, with a strong focus on timely completion of high-risk inspections. Enhanced supervisory monitoring and data-informed inspection planning improved consistency across regions and facility types. Inspectors identified and addressed risks early by strengthening preventive food safety practices, particularly among small and emerging firms.

The MFP improved its on-time inspection completion rate as a result. This work resulted in an 8% improvement from the start of the year, demonstrating measurable improvements in efficiency by inspecting 100 additional firms this past year, even during a time of staffing variability.

#### **Outcome: Effective enforcement that reinforces compliance**

When voluntary compliance was insufficient, the program used enforcement tools to protect public health and maintain consumer confidence. During the fiscal year, 30 enforcement cases were managed in coordination with the division's compliance team. Actions ranged from warning letters to administrative citations, serving both corrective and educational purposes by reinforcing accountability while supporting facilities in improving preventive controls and management systems.

### **Goal 2: Skilled staff and stronger external partnerships**

#### **Outcome: A more skilled and engaged workforce**

All inspectors completed FDA's standard training curriculum, and one staff member advanced through instructor-level training with FDA's Partnership for Regulatory Education and Training with a second team member well on their way. These investments strengthened technical expertise, inspection quality, and internal training capacity, directly supporting consistent and high-quality regulatory oversight.

#### **Outcome: Stronger partnerships through outreach and education**

Proactive outreach and education efforts connected the MFP with current and future food manufacturers, industry groups, and academic partners. Participation in 33 educational and outreach events improved the public's understanding of regulatory requirements, strengthened partnerships, and promoted voluntary compliance, which reinforces a preventive, collaborative approach to food safety.

## **Program Outputs**

In 2025, the Manufactured Food Program conducted 1,665 inspections, prioritizing routine (1,164) and complaints investigated (327) (Table 1).

Table 1: Types of inspections completed in 2025

| Type of Inspections                    | Inspection Description   | Total Number in 2025 |
|--|--|----------------------|
| <b>Routine Inspections</b>             | Risk-based inspections conducted at a scheduled frequency to ensure compliance with applicable food safety standards | 1,164                |
| <b>Complaints Investigated</b>         | Targeted inspection to assess a specific possible concern  | 327                  |
| <b>New Licenses Issued</b>             | Conducted to verify if a manufacturer or distributor meets requirements for food production.                         | 111                  |
| <b>Educational and Outreach Events</b> | An organized event (in-person or remote) designed primarily to educate a variety of stakeholders                     | 33                   |
| <b>Compliance Actions</b>              | Conducted when firms do not make timely or adequate corrections to food safety observations                          | 30                   |

## Program Inputs

Behind every inspection, license review, and outreach effort are the people, tools, and systems that make the MFP effective at protecting public health and supporting Minnesota's economy.

**People:** Our program relies on 18 full-time staff to achieve its objectives, along with multiple division-level team members to support its operation. Inspectors, supervisors, and support personnel are remotely positioned across the state to ensure timely and consistent service. As with any program, staffing levels are not consistent, and training is a significant impact to both the trainers and inspection capacity.

**Training:** Our team invests in ongoing professional development, completing an average of 40 hours of training per employee in areas ranging from food safety to leadership development.

**Systems:** The FDA's Manufactured Food Regulatory Program Standards serves as the backbone of the program's Quality Management System, streamlining how inspection and enforcement data is managed and used for decision-making.

**Funding:** MFP operations are supported through a combination of funds from state appropriations, dedicated license fees, and a contract and grant from the FDA. This enables inspections, staff training, and modernization projects that improve overall program effectiveness. The estimated MFP budget for the state fiscal year 2025 was \$2,160,133 total, with \$1,626,789 coming from dedicated fees, \$425,670 from the general fund, \$348,000 from special revenue (federal contract), and \$107,326 from a federal grant.

## Future Goals and Objectives

Looking ahead, the MFP will build on lessons learned to strengthen food safety, improve regulatory efficiency, and support Minnesota's food manufacturing community. We will also focus on modernizing systems, optimizing inspections, advancing workforce capability, and enhancing collaboration across programs.

### Assessment and response

The MFP will be focused on risk-based, data-driven inspections to identify and address potential food safety risks before they affect consumers. This will be accomplished, in part, by focusing our routine planning work with the Compliance team on firms not yet in the compliance system but showing early signs of repeat violations and inability to make corrections promptly. By December 31, 2026, use inspection and compliance data to identify at least 90% of high-risk facilities with repeat or escalating violations and prioritize them in routine inspection planning in coordination with the Compliance Team.

The rollout of the new electronic inspection system in the next two years will support accurate documentation, streamline reporting, and enable trend analysis to guide program planning. By using inspection data to target high-risk facilities and recurring violations where needed, the MFP continues to focus on firms having repeat observations and improving statewide compliance with food safety requirements.

### Enforcement

Enforcement activities will be targeted and educational. When voluntary compliance is insufficient to protect public health, corrective actions will be issued promptly in the field to maintain food safety standards and ensure accountability. By further integrating enforcement tracking into monthly work planning, the MFP will be establishing a baseline to monitor trends, assess outcomes, and measure the effectiveness of interventions over time. This will include tracking into routine work planning and establishing a dataset to monitor enforcement frequency, timeliness, and outcomes, with results reviewed biannually.

### Licensing

Modernizing the approach we take to license a firm is a priority. Objectives include clearly explaining what's expected and what compliance looks like. This year, the MFP is hiring a program-specific licensing specialist who will work within the division and with food license applicants. Objectives will focus on completing development of the modernized licensing process, including setting baseline performance metrics by using licensing-inspection data, along with completing onboarding and integration of a Manufactured Food Program licensing specialist, with defined roles supporting applicants, inspection staff, and compliance coordination.

### Outreach and education

Proactive outreach will continue to support voluntary compliance and promote a culture of food safety. The MFP will conduct targeted outreach, technical consultations, and cross-program training, including collaboration with the MDA's Produce Safety and Retail Food Programs by completing at least two cross-program training or outreach initiatives to improve consistency of regulatory expectations and inspection practices.

Outreach will focus on helping businesses understand regulatory expectations, licensing requirements, and implement best practices between programs to strengthen overall food safety performance. We plan to develop and disseminate at least three educational resources (e.g., guidance documents, webinars, or FAQs) addressing common compliance challenges identified through inspection data.

By focusing on these priorities, the MFP will continue to evolve its programs to meet emerging challenges, leverage new tools and data, and support a skilled, capable workforce. These strategic initiatives ensure that Minnesota's food supply remains safe, regulated efficiently, and supported by strong partnerships with industry and regulatory partners alike.

## **Acknowledgments**

The success of this past year belongs to the MFP team, including its inspectors, supervisors, administrative and program standards staff, along with our dedicated public health partners in the State of Minnesota and the FDA.

We also thank the Minnesota food industry for its continued commitment to producing safe, high-quality products. Together, we're building a food safety system Minnesotans can trust while promoting a thriving economy.