



SAFHER®

Withdrawal of FDA Funding Halts SAFHER Development

Dear AFDO Stakeholder,

I want to provide you with an update on the progress of the SAFHER (System for Agriculture, Food, Health, E-Inspections, and Registration) platform.

SAFHER Work Stopped:

FDA funding decisions have forced AFDO to stop work on the SAFHER (System for Agriculture, Food, Health, E-Inspections, and Registration) platform. Despite its significant potential and the excitement it has inspired within the state and local regulatory community, AFDO will cease development of the platform due to the withdrawal of FDA funding for the upcoming year. This has been a successful IT project. We were excited to deliver to the states on time, but this is another example of a lack of sustained federal vision, planning, and investment.

SAFHER represents tens of thousands of hours of dedicated work by impacted state and local regulatory partners and the SAFHER team. The platform would have delivered substantial cost savings for states, potentially in the range of hundreds of thousands of dollars, increased efficiencies in work, and improved public access to information and transparency. It would improve industry's ability to interact with regulatory programs.

The AFDO SAFHER team, including Kellie Isaac, Jacob Fleig, Debbie Pickle, and Renee Norwood, will have their positions eliminated in early 2025. Jennifer Pierquet will transition back to full-time leadership of USAFoodSafety and USAPlants.

AFDO expresses its deep gratitude to Kellie and her team for all the work they've done.

Budget Challenge:

With FDA support, AFDO reallocated resources from other cooperative agreements and programs earlier this fall in support of the SAFHER project. The project has been continually underfunded by FDA's Human Foods Program, the Center for Veterinary Medicine, the Office of Investigations and Inspections, and all these agencies' predecessors.

With significant help from influential state regulatory partners, states and AFDO communicated disappointment with this funding prioritization over the past week, yet the FDA has not changed its position. AFDO wishes it were different but needed to make some difficult decisions effective today.

Recent budget actions indicate that FDA is not prioritizing the support of state and local programs. It is disappointing that the agency has chosen not to further the spirit, intent, and language of FSMA for an integrated food safety system that depends on state and local regulatory resources.



Questions and concerns about FDA funding decisions and this program should be expressed to the decision makers:

- Jim Jones, jim.jones@fda.hhs.gov
- Michael Rogers, michael.rogers@fda.hhs.gov
- Don Prater, donald.prater@fda.hhs.gov
- Tracy Forfa, tracey.forfa@fda.hhs.gov
- Erik Mettler, erik.mettler@fda.hhs.gov

SAFHER Progress:

This platform was launched with the vision of creating a highly flexible and configurable replacement for the USAFoodSafety and USAPlants systems. AFDO is proud of the progress made and the impact achieved by all involved:

- Planning for the platform started six years ago. Funding for development began 30 months ago, and \$14.4 million has been invested to date. The platform is nearly 80% completed; 560 of the 722 total implementation requirements are done and under anticipated development budget to date.
- Release was on schedule for pilot programs in spring 2025 with product implementation beginning in summer 2025.
- SAFHER has been supported by 167-plus dedicated workgroup enrollees, including 33 agencies in 27 states (and another five states have expressed interest in SAFHER).
- The low-code, no-code solution utilizing the Appian platform can support 27 health and agriculture department programs, such as manufactured food, retail food, Grade A milk, shellfish, cottage foods, animal food, swimming pools, body art, lodging, pesticides, seed, and fertilizer.

AFDO wants to express its gratitude to everyone who dedicated time, energy, and support to this much-needed endeavor over the last three years. Their dedication and belief in the mission has been truly inspiring. AFDO expresses its appreciation to the vendors involved, such as Slalom Consulting; Appian; Vision Point Systems, including its subcontractors, Zimpatica and Concorde; and Precise Software Solutions.

What's Happening Now:

At this point, FDA has indicated that it plans to continue to support USAFoodSafety for another year, but the Center for Veterinary Medicine has decided to discontinue support for USAPlants effective September 30, 2025. Over the next several weeks, AFDO will investigate the following potential options, including:

- Continuing the development of SAFHER by individual states
- Extending the lifespan of USAFoodSafety
- Extending the lifespan of USAPlants
- Investigating any simplified transition to other systems

We anticipate maintaining the SAFHER code set for a period of time and hope that funding will be restored but also recognize the significant cost and technical hurdles of restarting the project.



AFDO remains committed to exploring options that can assist states in their efforts to protect public health. If any state is interested, AFDO will provide rights and access to the SAFHER code.

Thank you for your understanding and continued support. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

Steven Mandernach

Executive Director

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