



# OTSC Quarterly Newsletter



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## OTSC Laboratory Online Course Offered Worldwide - By Blair Fannin

Quality systems that ensure repeatable and defensible analytical results are critical to the safety and quality of regulated products. In the global marketplace, the integrity of sample testing is absolutely necessary for fair trade and the protection of consumer health. To strengthen quality laboratory systems in developing countries, the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO), Texas A&M University, and the Office of the Texas State Chemist developed *Laboratory Quality Systems*, an online training (E-course) offered for both professional and graduate credit. The course has been offered since 2013, and it provides laboratory professionals with the breadth of knowledge needed to obtain laboratory data and results that are reliable, interpretable, repeatable, and defensible. Course topics include chain of custody, method development, information management, laboratory accreditation, and international laboratory standards. Improving quality control is critical for sustainable development of the livestock sector.

Now celebrating its third year, the FAO-TAMU course offered in summer 2015 had 25 participants from 17 countries around the globe. "The demand for this course has always been very high and a large number of laboratory staff from developing countries apply for this course; however, it is extremely difficult to conduct the course for more than 25 participants at one time because performance and assignments of candidates are personally monitored and they are individually mentored by the course instructors", said Harinder Makkar, Coordinator of the program from FAO. Based on comments from this year's students, it is evident that a majority of the participants found the course content to be of "great relevance and practical use" and were immediately able to incorporate the concepts and skills learned into the daily operations of their

laboratory. The course's dual focus on laboratory quality systems knowledge and the practical skills needed to apply this knowledge is especially useful to laboratory personnel who are in the initial stages of developing a laboratory quality system or implementing an ISO system. One FAO participant noted that "our laboratory system will feel the positive impact of this knowledge for better positioning and improvement in order to produce highly accurate, reliable and defensible result." Furthermore, the participants have access to expert faculty from TAMU, who can offer assistance addressing and improving laboratory quality issues happening in their own lab settings. Many of the participants commented that they would be open to participating in other similar programs offered by TAMU and/or FAO.

Participants benefit from the course by learning how to implement quality systems in a laboratory to assess regulated products. According to Tim Herrman, the course director, TAMU, "an outcome of the course, the participants will be better equipped to manage a laboratory and evaluate the quality and reliability of laboratory data under industrial and regulatory settings in the global market". By participating in the TAMU/FAO *Laboratory Quality Systems* course, participants are able to recognize the value of a laboratory quality system and its essential role in improving lab functioning. Drs. Tim Herrman, Susie Dai, and Jim Balthrop from TAMU were the primary instructors for the LQS course with Prabha Vasudevan serving as the course facilitator. TAMU and FAO are highly committed to help and assist the global laboratory system strive for better quality by providing laboratory personnel with the relevant and necessary knowledge and skills. This course is expected to be conducted in the summer of 2016 as well.

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*Protects consumers & enhances Agri-Business through its Feed & Fertilizer Regulatory Compliance Program, surveillance & monitoring of Animal-Human health & environmental hazards, & preparedness planning.*

## Announcing an Upcoming HACCP Distance Learning Opportunity

Implementation of hazard analysis and preventative food safety controls by feed manufacturers is required in the 2011 Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). Many feed firms have already begun to implement preventative controls using Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles to address their customers' needs, retain competitiveness in a global market, and prepare for the FDA regulations, published in Fall 2015. The online course, offered January 25-April 1, 2016 will equip feed

manufacturers with tools and practices to develop a HACCP plan in a team environment. The course is constantly updated to reflect new science involving feed hazards and changing regulations. Students who successfully complete all course assignments earn a Texas A&M University Certificate of Completion with an International HACCP Alliance seal, and members of the American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists are eligible to earn 8 continuing education units.

## Fall OTSC Advisory Committee Meeting

The OTSC advisory committee met Oct. 2, 2015 in College Station. Action items from the meeting include aligning fertilizer grade policy, rule and practices. The topic will be revisited during the Spring 2016 meeting; a subcommittee will provide input in advance of the meeting.

Donnie Dipple discussed the impact of Responsible Ag on fertilizer industry compliance with federal

safety regulations and the level of participation in Texas. The annual budget and industry compliance history were discussed.

New members of the advisory committee include: David Volleman, Suzy Davis, Josh Birdwell and Jake Pieniazek. Outgoing members include A.J. Kresta, A.J. Rath, and Mark Hebert. The new chair is Scott Piercy and vice-chair is Ben Weinheimer.

## OTSC Building Expansion Update

The building expansion for the Office of the Texas State Chemist, part of Texas A&M AgriLife Research, is underway and on schedule for completion in mid-February or early March 2016. There are four phases in this construction project, and Phase 1 (foundation) is complete. The remaining phases currently in progress include:

Phase 2 (structure) – 70 percent complete, walls are up, concrete on the roof is finished, the roof is being dried in and windows are being installed;

Phase 3 (interiors) – In the beginning stages with metal studs being installed and plumbing and HVAC being roughed in; and

Work Phase 4 (site work) – Work has not yet begun.

