

**ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN FEED CONTROL OFFICIALS (AAFCO)
1800 SOUTH OAK STREET, SUITE 100
CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS**

**MINUTES OF THE CURRENT ISSUES AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE MIDYEAR MEETING
HELD AT THE NEW ORLEANS MARRIOTT
555 CANAL STREET
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
JANUARY 20, 2026, 1:00 P.M. CT**

MEMBERS:

Jo Lynn Otero
Bethany McAnulty
Alan Keller
Bernadette Mundo
Debra Brasel
Katie Simpson
Kristen Green
Nathan Moon
Wendy Powell
Holly Jewell

ADVISORS:

Bill Bookout
Berit Foss
Betsy Flores
Charles Starkey
Emily Helms
Louise Calderwood
Chris Olinger
McKeeley Stansberry

AAFCO:

Austin Therrell Executive Director

GUESTS:

Tera Keatts Partner, Philosophy Communication
Nadia Bennett Product Manager, SWARM Engineering
Richard Ten Eyck
Johanna Ballesteros
Nadia Croteau
Eric Johnson Recording Secretary, Minutes Solutions Inc. (via teleconference)

1. CALL TO ORDER

There being a quorum present, and adequate and proper notice of the meeting having been given, the meeting was called to order at 1:01 p.m.

2. WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Jo Lynn Otero welcomed the attendees to the AAFCO Current Issues and Outreach Committee (CIOC) midyear meeting. It was noted that 84 new AAFCO members were in attendance. A roll call of CIOC members and advisors was taken.

3. OLD BUSINESS

3.1 CIOC / Philosophy Workgroup Updates

Tera Keatts reported strong media outreach in 2025 with 45 articles, podcasts and interviews published that reached an audience of about 100 million, including about 800,000 podcast listeners. Topics addressed in media coverage ranged from information about scientific review of ingredient submissions to details about programs and specific feed ingredients. The year was also marked by significant general industry awareness coverage.

Tera Keatts reported that in 2025 a partnership was established with Amazon to serve the public with information through Amazon's consumer safety tip section. This service is expected to expand in 2026. Also, 2026 plans call for continuing to provide outreach in areas such as thought leadership as well as educating pet and livestock owners on the important role that AAFCO plays in animal feed safety.

Also reported by Tera Keatts was a 13% increase in social media activity. This activity included a substantial LinkedIn usage increase to 12,500 impressions on LinkedIn posts. Also noted was that Facebook content logged about a half-million views.

Tera Keatts asked for individuals and groups to consider submitting information for media profiles. All are welcome to participate.

3.2 Label Review Task Force Workgroup Update

Austin Therrell provided an update on the process of exploring a label review group based on an AAFCO resolution that passed in 2025. The resolution called for pursuing a volunteer label review program. AAFCO members internally have started working toward this goal and will later invite advisors and industry representatives to provide input in order to benefit everyone and promote harmonization among state programs.

Austin Therrell reported that the effort still has a long way to go. Work is continuing in areas such as software and logistics, how revisions could be made, how to collect input, and how to build a payment structure. Details of a payment package have yet to be worked out. The task force was to meet after the CIOC meeting in order to discuss these and other issues.

Also reported was that the effort is expected to gain speed in coming months. Noted was that the label review group remains in the planning stages, since the effort began with only a resolution. AAFCO has thus given approval to pursue development of the program and has yet to make a final decision on implementation. But a decision could be made at the 2026 annual meeting.

3.3 Certified Retailer Course Workgroup Update

A committee decision in 2025 has resulted in workgroup progress on a training program for retailers. Austin Therrell reported that work is continuing on what has been called certified retailer course program for training. Currently, the group is gauging interest in such a program and investigating whether there are adequate resources for a training program or webinar course for retailers. Also being investigated is whether to expand the training to distributors.

Austin Therrell reported reaching out to local animal food and feed stores on whether they would be interested in such a program. Based on this outreach, the group feels that there is interest. The group has also investigated possible program content and what the content should focus on. Also under study is whether to bring in a third party to help in building a program. Work is expected to be completed in time for the 2026 AAFCO annual meeting.

4. NEW BUSINESS

Bethany McNulty introduced new business with a request for more committee assistance, noting a need for new members and advisors to support the committee's work.

4.1 AVA Demonstration

Richard Ten Eyck announced that the AVA closed-source artificial intelligence technical assistant is now running and accessible worldwide. Katy Simpson and 36 beta testers attending the CIOC meeting were acknowledged for their work to build and train the AVA system. Also acknowledged were representatives from AVA development contractor SWARM Engineering.

Nadia Bennett of SWARM showed a video explaining how to access and use AVA. The video explained that AVA can field questions from approved "feedbin" users and provide answers from AAFCO sources and based on regulatory perspectives. Conversations with AVA are kept confidential and stored for easy user access. Stressed was that questions should include context and details so that AVA can search data thoroughly; the more context and specifics included in a question, the better. Answers will always include reference links and can be emailed to a user. Users can share answers they obtain with other feedbin users.

Noted was that AVA retrieves information from AAFCO resources only and backs every answer with one or more links to those resources. Also noted was that AVA users should always consult with original sources before making a decision. Moreover, suggestions and input from users are welcome as these can help improve AVA.

5. INDUSTRY UPDATE

Jo Lynn Otero welcomed reports from industry group representatives.

5.1 National Animal Supplement Council (NASC)

The NASC annual conference scheduled for May, 2026, is to include discussions on expanding work in the area of pet treats. A decision on treats, which is a food term, is expected to be announced soon.

5.2 National Grain and Feed Association (NGFA)

It was announced that the NGFA annual conference is to be held in March, 2026.

5.3 American Feed Industry Association (AFIA)

AFIA has named three new members to its professional staff. The conference schedule and training options were described.

5.4 Pet Food Institute

Announced was the institute’s website addition of new resources to help consumers understand dietary fiber issues. Recently added was a frequently asked questions document to help producer members with projects related to modernizing labels.

5.5 North American Renderers Association

Announced was that more training, including lab training, is being made available covering the use of animal products in food or feed. Noted was that the EPA food waste strategy’s wasted food scale has been revised to include rendering products. Also noted was that National Rendering Day is being promoted as an acknowledgment of rendering as a contributor to environmental sustainability.

6. CONSUMER RELATIONS COMMITTEE UPDATE

Bethany McAnulty noted that the committee has one member so far and needs more. Anyone who wants to participate can contact Bethany McAnulty.

7. ADJOURNMENT

It was agreed that there was no further business to transact; the meeting was closed by Jo Lynn Otero at 2:33 p.m.

DISCLAIMER

The above minutes should be used as a summary of the motions passed and issues discussed at the meeting. This document shall not be considered a verbatim copy of every word spoken at the meeting.

Director

Director

Date

Date