

Food Safety In Foodservice Operations

Summary of significant trends:

While our food supply is among the safest in the world, each year 76 million Americans are still stricken with foodborne illness, and some—mostly the very young, elderly, and the chronically ill—die as a result. Hospitalization costs for these illnesses are estimated at more than \$3 billion a year and costs from lost productivity are much higher.

Emerging Trends:

Americans are eating more of their meals away from home—an estimated 54 billion meals in 2002 alone. This food is purchased not only from grocery stores and restaurants, but is also eaten in institutional settings such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and day care centers. Each year the typical person eats an average of 218 meals away from home and spends nearly half (46.1%) of their food dollars (\$855) eating out. The result of this shift in food consumption away from the home increases the risk for disease-producing errors.

The restaurant industry employs an estimated 11.6 million people making it the largest employer outside of government in the U.S. In North Carolina, there are over 25,000 foodservice establishments employing nearly a quarter million people. The challenges faced by this industry include high rates of turnover and lan-

guage and literacy barriers. As a result many foodservice operators, do not have the resources to provide in-depth training in the area of food safety. Without proper training, foodservice workers could commit errors that could result in foodborne illness. The most recent summary of foodborne illnesses in the U.S. show that nearly 50% of all reported illnesses are due to improper handling in the foodservice environment. Therefore, foodservice workers need to be properly trained on the how's and why's of safe food handling.

Relevance of Trends to County Programs:

Foodborne illness is nearly 100% preventable if the food handler knows and applies safe food handling practices. Education is a cost-effective option for prevention of foodborne illness. Many areas of the U.S. rely solely on a regulatory approach for the prevention of foodborne illness in the foodservice environment. As a result, foodborne illnesses might not be prevented from occurring. Educating workers is essential. Chain operations have the advantage of access to corporate staff who can provide training free-of-charge. Small independent restaurants and some institutional operations have fewer resources available to them for training. County Extension Centers have been meeting the needs

of the foodservice industry, especially those small operations, since 1996 by providing low cost, high quality training that is accessible and that can be tailored to meet their specific needs.

Sources of Supporting Data:

National Restaurant Association—Industry at a Glance

www.restaurant.org/research/ind_glance.cfm

U.S. Food and Drug Administration—Report of the FDA Retail Food Program Database of Foodborne Illness Risk Factors

<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/retrsk.html>

Primary contact: Angela M. Fraser, Ph.D.
angela_frazer@ncsu.edu

2003



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