

State Agency Training Activities Related to Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs, 2003-2005

Executive Summary

Background

The Government Accounting Office (GAO) completed a report on food safety in schools entitled “School Meal Programs: Few Instances of Foodborne Outbreaks Reported, but Opportunities Exist to Enhance Outbreak Data and Food Safety Practices.” In this report, there were recommendations on how to improve food safety practices in schools. The GAO requested an update on progress on implementation of the recommendation for USDA to promote training and certification in food safety.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) cooperated in developing a survey of state agencies to determine food safety certification, education, and training practices that are implemented by state agencies. Specific objectives of the project included:

1. Determine requirements of each state for food safety certification, education, and training for various levels of employees.
2. Determine the system utilized to assure compliance with food safety requirements.
3. Determine the type of training provided, sequence of training, frequency of training, and numbers trained.
4. Identify who is developing and conducting training for the state agency.
5. Compile a comprehensive list of food safety resources used for food safety education that can be shared on web sites such as the FNS’ Healthy School Meals Resource System (<http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/>) and the NFSMI website (www.nfsmi.org).

Responses were received from 40 state agencies and the District of Columbia. This group of 41 will be referred to as state agencies. States from all USDA regions were represented in the study sample.

Key Findings

- There are limited requirements for food safety certification, education, and training for foodservice employees at various levels.
 - Only three of 41 states or the District of Columbia have certification requirements for directors, and five of 41 have requirements for foodservice supervisors and workers.
 - Four states have education and training requirements in place of certification for foodservice directors and supervisors, and five have a requirement for foodservice workers.
 - None of the 41 states or the District of Columbia has an education requirement in addition to certification.

- While few states indicated requirements for food safety certification and education/training, many indicated that they did assure compliance.
 - For 20 states, there are no food safety certification or education/training requirements so compliance is not verified.
 - In seven states, the state department of health or its equivalent verifies training by checking certificates or interviewing employees on their knowledge of food safety, consistent with Food Code requirements in these states.
 - The state agency in ten states monitors compliance through:
 - Certification records filed with the state agency
 - Training rosters filed with the state agency
 - Reviews such as School Meals Initiative (SMI) reviews and Coordinate Review Effort (CRE)
 - In three states, both the department of health and the state agency conduct verification of compliance with food safety requirements.

- Training related to food safety and HACCP varies among states.
 - Seven of the 41 state agencies responding indicated that no food safety education had been offered during the past two years, with some of these state agency personnel indicating that they were waiting on new materials being developed by the NFSMI.
 - For state agencies offering food safety and HACCP education, many offered various options in terms of scope of material covered.
 - Basic food handlers' programs were offered in 26 of 41 states and the District of Columbia by local or state health departments.
 - ServSafe® training and certification was offered in 31 states.
 - *Serving it Safe* was offered in 27 states.
 - HACCP training, based on NFSMI materials, was offered in 29 states.
 - Of the 34 state agencies that offered food safety education and training programs between 2003 and 2005 (*Serving it Safe*, ServSafe®, or both), 24,001 foodservice employees were trained in basic food safety and 3,930 foodservice employees were trained using ServSafe®.
 - HACCP training was provided to 8,216 individuals.

- State agencies rely on resources developed by other groups, such as NFSMI, to support their training programs.
- Of the 41 state agencies, 13 have developed or modified programs specifically for their state.
- Six main groups conduct food safety training for state agencies: state agency staff; NetPro or Team Nutrition Training Cadre; NFSMI staff or trainers; Cooperative Extension staff; department of health staff; and consultants.
- In most states, there is training conducted by other entities that is not tracked by state agencies. Training is provided by Cooperative Extension, restaurant associations, state and district School Nutrition Associations, and others. These other sources of food safety training and education make a significant impact on the number of school foodservice workers who receive training each year.

Conclusions

Based on results of this survey, most states have limited requirements for food safety certification, education, and training for various levels of employees. If certification or training is required, compliance is assured in a variety of ways through state Departments of Health, the State Agency, or both. Further, results indicate that state agency staff:

- Provide food safety training for school foodservice employees covering various scopes of information: basic food safety, certification-level food safety, and HACCP.
- Rely heavily on education and training resources developed by USDA, NFSMI, or the State Department of Health.
- Provide training or contract with consultants to provide training.
- Collaborate with other groups, such as the department of health or universities, to maximize training opportunities for school foodservice employees.
- Suggest additional food safety resources that would assist their training efforts. They need a variety of materials and formats for both basic food safety and HACCP that facilitate training and reinforce key points and behaviors for front line workers. They also need financial resources to support food safety training and education efforts.

For additional information, contact:

National Food Service Management Institute
800-321-3054
www.nfsmi.org