

## *Safe and Secure Food and Fiber System* **Safe Food 2000**

### **Issue**

Food borne illness continues to increase in Arizona. The Arizona Department of Health Services reported more than 8100 suspected cases in 1997. Experts believe that the risk of Food borne illness is increasing due to changes in the food supply system; an increase in group feeding; an increase in the number of people at greatest risk of Food borne illness—elderly, children and people with suppressed immune systems; changes in pathogens and new resistant strains; and new modes of transmission of pathogens. An interdisciplinary, research-based approach to education is needed on the issues affecting the safety and quality of the food supply from the farm to the table.

### **What has been done?**

Safe Food 2000 is a multi-year project focusing on education in food safety with the general public, school food service staffs, group home staffs, food banks and other community groups.

### *Funding*

Smith-Lever 3(d)—EFNEP, USDA-CSREES, University of Arizona Cooperative Extension

Note: The following contributors do not provide direct funding, but they do provide staff time and collaborate on projects:

Collaborating organizations—vary by project: Arizona Department of Health Services, Offices of Food Safety and Nutrition, Maricopa County Department of Environmental Health, USDA, FSIS, Intertribal Council, Arizona Department of Agriculture, FDA, Arizona Beef Council, Tucson AIDS Project, Arizona Crop Protection Association, Arizona Department of Education, Smith's Food and Drug Centers, Arizona Gleaning Dairy Council of Arizona, Arizona Republic — newspaper, Maricopa County Farm Bureau, Local food banks

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The ultimate goal is to reduce Food borne illness in Arizona and to increase safe food handling practices, from the field to the consumer's plate.

The program uses a broad array of both written information and workshops delivered in several counties in Arizona. Workshops include Master Consumer Adviser volunteer training, food safety education classes, EFNEP (Extension Food and Nutrition Education Program) classes, Safe Food Handling for the Occasional Quantity Cook, Train the Trainer for 70 volunteers and local classes, and an annual Food Safety from the Farm to the Table Conference. Information services include 800-number food safety hotlines, weekly news columns on food safety in a Phoenix newspaper, and Safe Food Weeks, when food safety information packets are delivered to print and broadcast media for dissemination to the public.

### **Impact**

More than 2000 low income families annually have attended EFNEP

classes in Arizona. Of these, 93% have made positive changes in their food behaviors, and 52% improved safe food practices, according to follow-up surveys. Safe food practices result in reduced medical costs and fewer lost work days. Similar results occurred with school and institutional food service staffs. In a six-month follow-up survey with participants, 95% reported improvement in at least one safe food practice due to the training, with a 30% increase in safe food practices. These changes affected more than 200,000 children or at-risk adults. As the program spreads, the total potential number of elementary students affected by food lunch practices in Arizona would be more than 562,000 children. Food service personnel are constantly changing, so ongoing education is critical. Extension volunteers and staff have trained more than 300 community quantity cooks in safety practices. Participants report adding new safe practices to their quantity meals with church members, fund-raising dinners and homeless outreach.