

# impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



## Safe and Secure Food and Fiber Systems

# Arizona's Statewide Food Safety Program

### Issue

Foodborne illness and death continue to occur in Arizona. The Arizona Department of Health Services reported more than 2039 cases in 2000. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that only 10 percent of all cases are even reported. The 2000 FDA report on food safety stated that between 6.5 and 8.1 million cases of foodborne illness and as many as 5000 related deaths occur each year in the United States. Experts believe that the risk of foodborne 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 foodborne 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 2010 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. The ultimate goal is to reduce foodborne 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, and a biennial 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 area 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 percent have made positive changes in their food behaviors, and 52 percent 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 percent

reported improvement in at least one safe food practice due to the training, with a 30 percent 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. Reported cases of foodborne illness in Arizona declined from 5200 in 1995 to 2039 in 2000.

Conference feedback: 150 Safe Food 2002 conference participants rated the conference general and concurrent sessions 4.5 out of 5 as high. Twenty six people who had attended in 2001 reported they had shared the information with 5400 additional people. Survey data from previous Safe Food Conferences showed that 84 percent had used the Safe food 2000 conference information and materials at work or home; 84 percent said the conference helped them update their current job skills; 72 percent had shared information with co workers and 46 percent shared information with people they taught or trained.

### Funding

University of Arizona Cooperative Extension  
Staff time: Maricopa, La Paz and Yavapai County Department of Environmental Health, Arizona Department of Health Services Arizona Department of Agriculture  
USDA-CSREES,  
Industry supporters  
Staff time: Food banks, restaurant industry, Intertribal Council, local grocery representatives, Arizona Beef Council, Arizona Gleaning, parish ministry and social service organizations

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