

Appendix E. Summary of the Retail Food Safety Roundtable Nov 2-3, 2006 Las Vegas, NV

A Retail-Foodservice Food Safety roundtable conference occurred November 2-3, 2006 in Las Vegas, NV. The conference centered on three main issues: (a) Collaboration in retail food safety; (b) Research and best practices; and lastly, (c) Education and outreach. Since this was the first meeting of this group, the goal of discussions was to enlighten issues from different perspectives, to find common ground, to suggest potential solutions, or just to identify areas that need further consideration. Some action items resulting from the roundtable are listed in the Project Narrative above. A summary of topics follows.

I. Collaborations. An IFT symposium in July 2004 pointed out that the retail-foodservice industry is not fully aware of academic research and outreach capabilities. And, academic professionals are not fully aware of the needs of the retail-foodservice industry with respect to food safety. The participants stressed the need for more collaboration between academic research and outreach and the retail-foodservice industry. To respond to the need for strengthened ties between academia (extension) and the retail-foodservice industry this consortium was proposed.

This session began with defining the boundaries of the many different associations that have missions that are closely associated with retail food safety. Over 20 different groups/associations were present and identified. Some of these are listed in detail in Appendix A. Each of these groups, in turn, represents tens-of-thousands retail food safety professionals. The analysis of the boundaries that exist among retail food safety professionals resulted in the roundtable making several action requests. (1) List all stakeholder groups involved in retail-foodservice food safety and a brief description of their members. (2) Assess all stakeholders to identify their strengths and weaknesses. (3) Identify areas that could benefit via collaborations. Roundtable discussions also highlighted the need share information between these groups and associations. It was also noted that industry has developed a great amount of information that is not normally shared. To help share information, a Retail and Foodservice Food Safety portal website was suggested. It should function like other clearinghouse websites to direct professionals to retail food safety information and resources.

Finally, a key question was asked. "Is there a value in bringing all of these groups together over retail food safety? The answer was a unanimous, "yes". The suggestion was made to meet annually, but to meet in conjunction with one of the larger association meetings, such as IFT, IAFP, AFDO, CFP, etc. The Cooperative Extension members offered to create a multi-state NIMSS project to help solidify the consortium and to sustain it in the coming years.

II. Research and best practices. The IFT symposium in July 2004 pointed out that there is not a clear channel of communication between food safety researchers and those professionals that might identify research needs. It was acknowledged that the Conference for Food Protection does identify needs, but only for issues with direct relevance to the Food Code. There are no other formal mechanisms to identify research needs in retail food safety. The call to action was to develop a formal mechanism to identify retail-foodservice research priorities on an ongoing basis and communicate priorities to stakeholders. Furthermore, participants also requested the

creation of a database of retail-foodservice researchers and educators together with their current and past projects.

The topic of best practices was also discussed. It was noted that the current inspection based system only motivated operators in a negative manner, e.g. what you **CANNOT** do. There are few projects that seek to offer alternative methods of what an operator **CAN** do. One participant offered that scientifically validated methods should be called “proven” practices. Several individual issues were identified that could use best “proven” practices, such as: allergen control, handling potentially hazardous foods, disinfection of raw produce for bacteria and viruses, efficient and safe cooking methods, and the correct thermometer to use and how to use it correctly.

The roundtable introduced another positive motivation in retail food safety, “economics”. Participants discussed that safer methods or procedures would be more likely practiced if they also saved the operator money or time. The roundtable recognized the need for more research into the area of cost-benefit analysis for retail-foodservice procedures, training, and education. There was a need to quantify the value of food safety efforts and the impact of food safety education on prevention of illness. Demonstrate how much it costs to make corrections (via an inspection) vs. doing it correctly from the start.

The roundtable recognized that research and best practices must take into account behavior change. Besides validating the effectiveness of best practices, there were other general issues in behavior change such as: to identify how a food safety message gets transmitted from owner to manager to employee, to evaluate management commitment to food safety, understand the capabilities of the FSM to manage food safety behaviors of employees, to identify what operators want in terms of food safety programs, and in what format(s).

Lastly, the participants identified two research issues important to retail food safety. The first is control of viral foodborne illnesses, e.g. to what degree are different viruses killed by heat, by acid, by sanitizers? What preventive practices can be used to prevent or reduce viral illness in retail-foodservice settings? Secondly, control of *Listeria monocytogenes* at retail is important. It was recognized that several Universities are currently studying *Listeria monocytogenes* at retail: Michigan State University, Colorado State University, and North Carolina State University.

III. Education / Outreach. This section’s discussion started out with identification of the boundaries to education and outreach. Some of the barriers included: restricted access to food safety resources, poor dissemination or knowledge of materials, a lack of understanding what front-line professionals need (e.g. sanitarians), and the need for multi-language materials.

Participants then discussed what resources their own organizations offered. This list was extensive and indicated that a large amount of information exists. The need for a mechanism to share this information was highlighted. There was also a need to validate that publications were science-based. The participants suggested that an effort to gather, peer review, and disseminate food safety materials would be worthwhile. These materials should be offered as model publications similar to the concept of eXtension. Individuals could brand the publication and modify for their own needs.

There was one important issue that crossed all of the topics. It was recognized that there was a boundary between sanitarians and other retail food safety professionals. Considerable efforts were requested to cross this boundary, including collaborations, identifying the needs of sanitarians (materials, resources, and training), and to better define the communication channels sanitarians have. It was clear that sanitarians are a key group that directly interact with operators and that this relationship should be exploited to its fullest. One sanitarian participant indicated the concept of “hip-pocket” training modules. These were a series of very short modules on cards that fit into the sanitarians pocket. He or she could consult them to verify food safety knowledge and competencies. Food Safety Managers could also use these training modules to offer training sessions in as little as 10 minutes per topic. An excellent suggestion was made to tie these short and simple modules to the Food Code Model inspection form. In that way sanitarians could indicate corrective actions to areas that were found out-of-compliance.

Lastly, it was recognized by the participants that there was a need to share ethnic materials across the country. A New York state regulatory participant indicated that her office has created resources in many different languages. This information is currently not being shared outside of the state.

Besides issues that were important to the retail food safety roundtable participants, there were two issues that were identified where the Consortium should **NOT** take a leadership role. The participants believed that the consortium is not the right group to play a leadership role in issues of rapid response (avian influenza, natural disasters) or food defense (bioterrorism). FDA, USDA, and CDC as well as other groups (e.g. National Center for Food Protection and Defense) should take a lead role and the consortium should be prepared to collaborate as needed. It was also indicated that communication efforts in food defense could be a viable option to communicate with operators in the future.