

Impact

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

Making food safe for everyone

CSU Extension leads the state in providing education to retail food handlers on preventing foodborne illness in restaurants and other food establishments.

Issue

Access to safe and nutritious food is the foundation of community health. In 2008, U.S. restaurants served more than 70 billion meals, accounting for almost half of every food dollar spent. Food prepared away from home can lead to both outbreaks and sporadic cases of foodborne illness. Furthermore, newcomers to retail food service and direct food sales are often young and inexperienced in safe food handling practices.

To prevent foodborne illness, food service employees need to know how to safely prepare, store and serve food. In Colorado, county health departments enforce food safety regulations at restaurants, delis, bakeries and other food-related businesses. Some Colorado counties complement these efforts with food handler trainings, but ongoing budget cuts have curtailed many of these. Instead, county health departments have collaborated with CSU Extension to provide food safety trainings to retail food establishment employees.

Extension's Response

In 2000, CSU Extension nutrition and food safety specialists were awarded a grant and developed a program called *Food Safety Works*. It taught entry-level or first time employees in the food service industry how to properly prepare, handle and store food. The curriculum was developed in collaboration with the Larimer County Health Department and piloted, in 2001-02, with Colorado Work Force centers, youth correctional facilities, and high school vocational programs. The program's success allowed Extension to adapt it to training food handlers in a variety of settings: retail establishments; hospitals; school cafeterias; and, volunteer organizations such as churches and fair concessionaires. CSU family and consumer science agents have taught the program in a classroom-type setting in more than 20 counties statewide.

Essentially, the *Food Safety Works* program teaches how to prevent foodborne illness through proper hand washing, cleaning and sanitizing equipment, safely handling and storing food, and avoiding cross-contamination. Fun and engaging hands-on activities help participants understand and retain course content. Trainings are offered for a fee (which varies by county) in both English and Spanish.



An Educational Manual For the Food Service Worker

The Bottom Line

- By teaching *Food Safety Works* to food handlers, CSU Extension steps in to provide much-needed public health education that many county health departments can no longer offer because of staffing shortages and budget cuts.

By the Numbers

- Classes conducted around the state in 2009: 74
- Food handlers trained around the state in 2009: 1,183
- Total food handlers trained in FSW since 2005: 3,950

Impact

Across the board, *Food Safety Works* participants gain confidence in knowing how to properly handle food. Participant surveys from across the state strongly indicate that employees plan to change their food handling practices to align with recommended safety protocols. Over time, this change in behavior will help prevent foodborne illness and improve public health.

Here are a few program highlights from across the state.

Larimer County

CSU Extension in Larimer County began offering *Food Safety Works* in 2005 when the county health department no longer had the resources to offer food handler trainings. The county helps fund an Extension agent solely dedicated to both retail and consumer food safety education. In five years, annual enrollment in Larimer County FSW programs has increased by 139 percent. In 2009, Larimer County Extension began mailing a new quarterly food safety newsletter to each area retail food establishment. The newsletter contains information on current issues, emerging pathogens, regulation updates, and the *Food Safety Works* training schedule. The publication is marketed primarily by health department inspectors who encourage restaurant participation. Since 2007, Larimer County Extension has generated nearly \$19,000 in *Food Safety Works* course fees.

Delta, Montrose, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Ouray and San Miguel Counties

In 2006, the West Central Public Health Partnership (WCPHP), a coalition of Western Slope county public health and environment personnel, contracted CSU Extension Tri River Area agents to teach 35 *Food Safety Works* classes annually until 2010. The programs were presented in six area counties. In 2009 at the four year mark, 116 classes had been held reaching a total of 1,474 participants. During the same year, this grant-funded effort expanded to Crested Butte Mountain Resorts where 66 employees were trained in *Food Safety Works* as part of the company's new staff orientation. A second training that same day served 33 employees from restaurants throughout the town of Crested Butte.

Extension is in the process of producing a training video in an effort to continue food safety training among retail food establishments once funding ends in December 2010.

Colorado State University Extension, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Colorado counties cooperating. Extension programs are available to all without discrimination. October 2010.

Colorado Healthy People 2010 & The Colorado Trust

CSU Extension's involvement in developing *Food Safety Works* is closely tied to Healthy People 2010, a national initiative led by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, and implemented in Colorado through The Colorado Trust. One of the initiative's goals is to improve employee behavior and food preparation practices in retail establishments that can cause foodborne illness. *Food Safety Works* helps meet that goal. Funding from The Colorado Trust has allowed Extension to present *Food Safety Works* throughout six Western Slope counties.

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