Improper Food-Handling Leads to Foodborne Illnesses

- More than 200 known diseases are transmitted through food.
- Foodborne diseases cause approximately 48 million illnesses, 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths each year in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Food can become contaminated at any stage between the farm and dinner table, including foodservice operations such as restaurants, nursing homes, day care centers and hospitals.
- Most outbreaks of foodborne illness are a direct result of improper food-handling practices, such as improper holding time and temperature, poor personal hygiene and contaminated equipment.

Extension’s Response

- The Food Protection Management Program is an accredited, certified food manager program that trains participants on safety principles related to food preparation and storage, personal hygiene, sanitary facilities maintenance and pest management.
- In 2011, 750 foodservice managers and employees attended the program. Many of these participants were in underserved rural areas of the state where public health oversight is limited.
- Furthermore, using a “train-the-trainer” approach, participants provided food-safety training to their employees, thus reaching approximately 3,600 more foodservice employees.

Economic Benefit

- Adoption of specific food-handling practices (before and after) was measured based on participant evaluation responses. A quantitative model maintained by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration was then used to estimate the impact on the number of cases of foodborne illness.
- Using economic costs of foodborne illnesses from the USDA’s Economic Research Service, participants’ adoption of proper food-handling practices resulted in an estimated 3,000 fewer cases of foodborne illness in 2011, and an economic benefit of approximately $2.1 million when accounting for reduced health care costs and lost productivity.

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