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Your consumer education connection

The Food Safety Educator

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■ Hitting the Highways

Coming your way! The USDA Food Safety Mobile. Launched by Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman and Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Elsa A. Murano in March 2003, the Food Safety Mobile is part of USDA's new, high-visibility food safety education initiative.

The USDA Food Safety Mobile is now on a nationwide tour to educate consumers about the importance of safe food handling. The 35-foot vehicle—and its eye-popping food safety messages—are heading for communities across the country.

Destined to turn heads as it treks down the highways, the Mobile is covered with graphics and features the notorious BAC!—the foodborne

bacteria that can make people sick.

As the graphics show, BAC! is beaten back by Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill.

The USDA Food Safety Mobile is traveling throughout the continental United States, appearing at state and county fairs, schools, libraries, grocery stores, community events, parades, festivals, cooperative extension offices, and special events sponsored by USDA.

At the vehicle's launch, Agriculture Secretary Veneman said, "The tour and the Mobile will help educate millions of people about the

risks associated with mishandling food and how they can reduce their risks of foodborne illness."

Under Secretary Murano emphasized that "foodborne illness is preventable. We want to empower consumers through education, and the USDA Food Safety Mobile will provide us with face-to-face access to millions of consumers."

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is moving aggressively against foodborne pathogens at every step along the farm-to-table continuum, she said.

This dynamic, new food safety education initiative is just one example of the agency's commitment to public health, Murano explained. •

USDA Food Safety Mobile



■ Mobile—Just One Part of the Total Package

The USDA Food Safety Mobile is only one part of the package of resources available for educators.

Here's what we do:

Once educators schedule the Mobile for a visit, FSIS will send a "local educator's" kit including:

- sample flyer for promoting the event.
- sample press release.
- broadcast-quality video and print-quality photography.
- promotional materials on the Mobile and food safety education programs, and
- backgrounder/talking points to assist in discussions and interviews.

But that's not all. When the Mobile comes, it's fully equipped to help make the event a success. That means it will have:

- a new interactive game designed to draw crowds and make learning fun;
- food safety publications and materials in English and Spanish;
- one Thermy™ costume and one BAC! costume;
- promotional items related to the Mobile;

- equipment for cooking demonstrations, including a propane grill and supplies; and

- DVD player, VHS player, and monitor for displaying educational videos.

Here's what local educators do:

For stops on the core schedule, FSIS will take the lead, but rely on local educators.

"We know local people are the heart of food safety education. So we have been calling on them when we are scheduled to stop in their towns. We look to them for their good advice and partnership," according to Susan Conley, director of food safety education for FSIS.

Stops off the core schedule depend entirely on local educators. They take the lead on promoting, executing, and staffing local events.

"Local educators are doing these kinds of events all of the time. The USDA Food Safety Mobile will just make their job a lot easier—and a lot more fun! Just imagine the Mobile pulling up to your town fair. It's a certified head-turning magnet for kids," Conley said. •

■ Space and Logistical Needs

The USDA Food Safety Mobile is 35 feet long, 8.5 feet wide, 11 feet tall, and weighs about 23,000 pounds. On site, a 20-foot by 40-foot area would be a good size to accommodate displays and demonstrations.

Using a site that can be seen from the road would maximize the Mobile's potential to attract people with its graphics. At night, a well-lit area is useful as the Mobile has limited external lighting. •

■ Requesting A Visit

To request a visit, check to see when the Mobile will be in your region by going to: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/foodsafetymobile>

Check the touring schedule on the Web site and send suggestions for upcoming visits this year and/or upcoming years.

E-mail to foodsafetymobile@fsis.usda.gov or call (301) 504-9605. •



No Town is Too Small!

While the USDA Food Safety Mobile is heading everywhere from the Indianapolis 500 to Cheyenne Frontier Days, no town is too small to schedule a visit.

“We’re encouraging local educators to contact us. We have a set core schedule, but anything is possible for events along the way,” according to Conley.

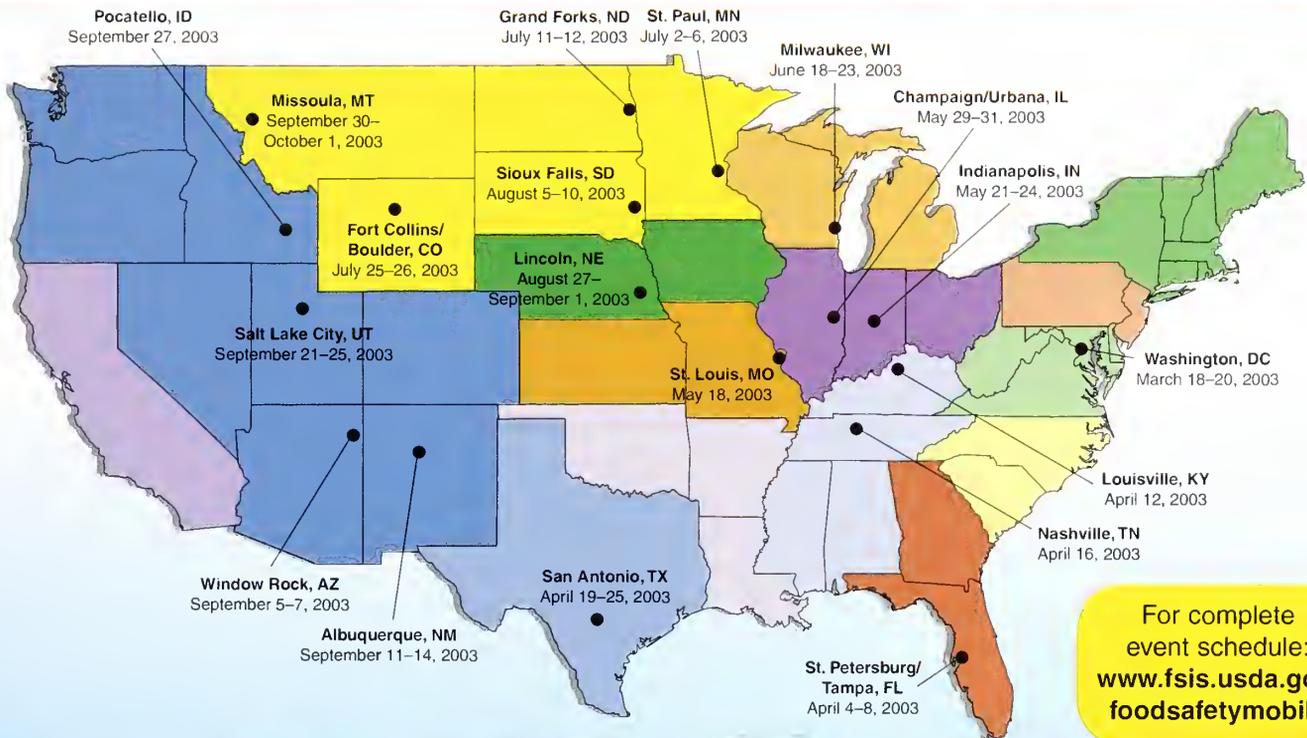
Educators can check the tour schedule of the USDA Food Safety Mobile by going to: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/foodsafety-mobile>

The Mobile is a “rolling billboard for food safety messages and a great backdrop to your educational programs,” Conley said.

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—Susan Conley

Trekking Across America! Here's Where We've Been...and Where We're Heading



Irradiation: Another Tool in the Food Safety Toolkit

There are no simple answers to the problem posed by foodborne illness, said Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Elsa A. Murano, speaking before the First World Congress on Food Irradiation in May 2003.

Quoting American critic and essayist H. L. Mencken, Murano said “For every problem, there is one solution which is simple, neat, and wrong.”

“I believe his words ring true as we debate how to break the cycle of foodborne illness,” she continued. “There is no one solution, and there are no simple answers.

“We also know that we are aiming for the proverbial ‘moving target.’ That is the nature of public health. As knowledge improves, new problems are identified, and new methods to reduce hazards are available, our strategies must change as well.”

“I believe that irradiation offers us an important tool in our fight against foodborne illness. But it is just that—another tool, not the only tool available,” she said.

Irradiation is one strategy, Murano said, that fits into a broader strategy based on:

- Bridging the gaps in monitoring food safety systems: Government agencies need to work with industry partners to encourage steps that will address food safety along the entire farm-to-table continuum. (See related article, “Opening the Umbrella of Food Protection,” page 5.)
- Continuing and improving science-based policy making: Implementing the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point system (HACCP) was a major step. But, “ensuring that HACCP systems address the hazards likely to occur is not a one-time exercise, but a continual process,” she said.
- Encouraging the application of decontamination methods throughout the farm-to-table continuum:

The decision to approve decontamination methods is based on whether the technology is safe and effective, she said.

“Irradiation meets both of these criteria. Irradiation has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for meat and poultry, as well as for a variety of other foods. Irradiation has been endorsed and supported by many highly respected public health organizations....In fact, it is one of the most thoroughly researched processes in



existence,” she said.

The 2002 Farm Bill, Murano continued, contained provisions related to new food pasteurization processes, such as irradiation. The Farm Bill mandated that foods that are made safer by approved technologies be made available through the National School Lunch Program. One of those approved technologies is irradiation.

The Farm Bill also charged the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) with the responsibility for educating the public about procedures—such as irradiation—to reduce pathogen levels in meat and poultry, Murano explained.

FSIS is exploring partnerships with universities around the country to educate the educators about irradiation, she said, as well as developing a new brochure that will be tested with focus groups.

“We know from calls to our Meat and Poultry Hotline that consumers have questions. These questions range from whether hamburgers can be served ‘rare’ if irradiated ground beef is used, to what type of labeling

Irradiation Web Links for Educators

From the USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center—

- http://peaches.nal.usda.gov/foodborne/fbindex/Food_Irradiation.asp
- http://peaches.nal.usda.gov/foodborne/fbindex/Foodirradiation_Ed_Resources.asp

Also check:

- <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/topics/irrmenu.htm>
- <http://www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/irradiat.html>

■ Opening the Umbrella of Food Protection

Food safety experts need to look beyond current assumptions concerning the farm-to-table continuum, according to USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Elsa A. Murano.

In a speech titled "Breaking the Cycle of Foodborne Illness" delivered in February 2003, Murano said, "I would like to expand on the meaning of the phrase 'farm-to-table,' and illustrate how it applies to the goal of improving food safety...."

"For a variety of reasons, some of them having to do with jurisdictional authorities, FSIS [Food Safety and Inspection Service] is focused on the processing phase of the meat and poultry chain." As a result, she said, other areas—such as animal production, transportation, product distribution, and storage—are underserved.

As Murano explained, "our efforts are akin to a partially opened umbrella that certainly is not providing as much public protection as possible. Well, we need to open the umbrella to cover the entire food chain," she said.

Bridging gaps may include focusing on animal production.

"Granted, FSIS does not have jurisdiction over ranches or feedlots. However, we have the expertise necessary to develop guidelines for critical steps in the process. I think it is time that we considered such a step, and we need the help of producers to develop such guidelines," she added.

In addition, Murano called for all interested parties to come together to develop a central, state-of-the-art source for the development of risk assessment.

"It is getting increasingly difficult to manage a threat when we are unsure of its pervasiveness. Risk assessment provides this vital element," she said.

Another element in reducing pathogens, she said, needs to be the application of validated decontamination methods throughout the farm-to-table continuum.

"Once these technologies prove successful, then they need to be approved in a fast-track manner so they can be implemented to protect consumers as soon as possible," she said.

"We have a historic opportunity to not only do what is right, but to do what is needed," Murano concluded.

To read the entire speech, go to: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/speeches/2003/em_coex.htm •

(Another Tool...continued from page 4)

is required for irradiated products," Murano said.

These questions are to be expected, she said. "Even though irradiation is not a new technology it is certainly more widespread now. We must respect the consumers' right to choose what he or she wants to purchase, and that is why the labeling requirement is so important.

"At the same time it's clear that we must educate the public so they can make informed decisions."

There are two points, Murano said, that are "imperative that we make in our education programs."

• **FSIS inspects all meat and poultry products, including those that are irradiated,** and these plants cannot use irradiation to substitute for good sanitation and process control.

• Consumers need to know that while irradiation reduces the level of pathogens, it generally does not make meat or poultry products sterile. **The process does not, she said, replace proper cooking and safe handling practices** by producers, retailers, and consumers.

To read the speech, go to: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/speeches/2003/em_irrad.htm

To access proceedings from the First World Congress on Irradiation, go to: <http://www.foodsafe.msu.edu> •

Did You Know...

According to the irradiation industry, it is now supplying irradiated ground beef to more than 7,000 stores nationwide and 2,000 restaurants, including a major food chain.

FSIS Funds On-Farm Food Safety Education

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) funds food safety education projects for animal and egg producers through state cooperative agreements.

The agreements encourage education regarding food safety measures that can be taken on the farm and cover a variety of topics, including the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system, microbial pathogens, drug residues, biosecurity, and quality assurance programs.

The agreements provide funding to a variety of stakeholders, including food animal producers, veterinarians, and public health personnel. Examples of projects in recent years include:

- Indiana has focused on developing an Animal Production Food Safety partnership with three teams—one each for poultry, dairy, and beef. Each team develops an educational program focusing on quality assurance targeted to the differing needs of their animal producers. A new initiative in 2003 seeks to link production practices with problems surfacing in packing houses.
- Nebraska has targeted information to food animal producers and their families, involving them in a preharvest food safety network. They have worked with extension educators, 4-H, and veterinarians. Their quality assurance education programs include a leader's guide, a handbook for youth, a video, and a "learning laboratory" kit of materials to be used in hands-on activities.
- The New York State Cattle Health Assurance Program is a model program that integrates the best management practices based on a comprehensive risk assessment of herd health and current management practices. New York used FSIS funding to support the position of coordinator for the program.



According to New York's cooperators, "a new approach is required to meet the numerous future challenges faced by the livestock production industry.... Producers and responsible agencies will have to establish preventative intervention strategies to maintain confidence in the food supply."

At the same time, New York's project recognizes that pathogen reduction programs must be designed with flexibility to accommodate a wide array of risks—a key concept in their program design.

- Oregon's cooperators note that quality assurance programs have tended to focus on drug and chemical residue avoidance.

However, "with a growing public and government concern for other food safety issues, like foodborne pathogens and transmission of antibiotic resistance from food animal groups to humans, the time has come for a major education effort in that direction," according to the program's authors.

Oregon's initiative educates producers of food animals about pathogen reduction strategies, with a

special emphasis on strategies that are broad in scope and have potential for controlling multiple pathogens.

- Vermont ranks first in New England in livestock production. Its initiative is designed to promote awareness of food safety among people involved in all phases of animal production, including transport, marketing, and processing. It has also focused educational outreach to dairy producers, providing intensive training to some and mass mailing of educational materials to others.

To learn more, go to:
<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/animalprod/partners/descriptions.htm> •

On-Farm Food Safety Resources.

The Foodborne Illness Education Information Center has a database of resources as well as a Web page devoted to animal health and food safety on the farm. Go to:
http://peaches.nal.usda.gov/foodborne/fbindex/Animal_Health.asp

■ New Partnership with U.S. Public Health Service



Dr. Garry McKee signs the agreement, while Under Secretary for Food Safety Dr. Elsa Murano and Surgeon General Richard Carmona look on.

Under a new agreement, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is significantly expanding the number of public health officers detailed to the agency from the U. S. Public Health Service's Commissioned Corps.

Approximately 30 additional officers are being detailed to all program areas nationwide.

According to FSIS Administrator Garry McKee, the officers will share their scientific and technical knowledge with FSIS employees, while

gaining a more comprehensive public health background working alongside their FSIS counterparts.

The U. S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps is a uniformed service of more than 6,000 health professionals who serve in many agencies with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as well as other federal agencies. The Surgeon General is the head of the Commissioned Corps.

According to McKee, the additional public health officers "will provide a level of expertise and professionalism in specialized areas that are key to protecting health."

In addition, flexible deployment rules for public health officers allow them to rapidly be reassigned to shifting priorities, such as outbreaks of foodborne illness.

McKee said the officers will work in a variety of areas, including homeland security, workforce development, and meeting critical priorities and needs. •

■ Norovirus Web Site

Norovirus, also known as Norwalk-like viruses, may be the leading cause of foodborne illness.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is now thought that at least 50 percent of all foodborne outbreaks of gastroenteritis can be attributed to noroviruses.

Familiar to many as the culprit causing illness among cruise lines in 2002, the viruses can be transmitted by food, or person to person. They can be tough to stamp out and persistent problem makers.

According to CDC, most outbreaks are likely to arise through direct contamination of food by a food handler immediately before it is eaten. Food and drink can easily become contaminated because it may take fewer than 100 norovirus particles to make a person sick.

Outbreaks have frequently been associated with cold foods, including various salads, sandwiches, and bakery products.

To help reduce norovirus-related illnesses, CDC has a new Web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/>

[revb/gastro/norovirus.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus.htm)) with:

- Norovirus Q&A
- Norovirus fact sheet
- Norovirus and food handlers

The site also includes a 24-page publication called "Norwalk-like Viruses: Public Health Consequences and Outbreak Management." •

■ Food Safety Education—Working Globally

Food safety educators from 20 nations were among the participants at the September 2002 conference *Thinking Globally, Working Locally: A Conference on Food Safety Education*.

Their participation was just one indicator of the growing presence of food safety education globally. From New Zealand to the Netherlands, health educators are turning their attention to safe food and safe water.

The Food Safety Educator will be highlighting some of these initiatives to reinforce the link between educators globally.

Addressing the issue of international food safety, USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Elsa Murano has suggested that one solution is “the education of all individuals who are involved in producing, transporting, and preparing food, from farm to table....Consumers

aren’t the only ones who need education.”

Education for farmers in developing nations is important, she added. “These folks need this information not only to enhance their competitiveness in selling their crops abroad, but for the well-being of the populations they feed, which certainly includes their own families,” she said. •



Web Sites of Interest to International Educators

- Links to international Web sites: <http://www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/fsgintl.html>
- Foreign language training tools: Check the database at the Foodborne Illness Education Information Center: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne/fbindex/037.htm>
- Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) en Espanol: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/spanish/index.htm>
- FSIS information in languages other than English: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/pubs/languages.htm>

■ FSIS Seminars for International Officials

Several times each year, meat and poultry inspection officials from dozens of countries head to College Station, Texas to learn about the U.S. inspection system from the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

The FSIS Training and Education Center in Texas hosts a three-week seminar typically made up of 35 participants representing 25 countries in the Americas, Asia, and Eastern and Western Europe.

Attended annually by more than 100 foreign government inspection officials, the seminar has been such a success that 11 FSIS employees managing the program were presented with USDA Honor Awards this summer.

The Meat and Poultry Inspection Seminar Team was presented the

award which recognized, in part, the role that the seminar plays in improving public health internationally.

According to Kurt Krusekopf of the Center, a primary goal of the seminar is to provide an understanding of U.S. meat and poultry regulations and new initiatives.

A major emphasis is on the FSIS Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system and Pathogen Reduction initiatives. Along with information about slaughter inspection, the seminar also covers animal production and import and export procedures.

But there is more to the seminar than classroom learning. Participants go out into the field almost every day. Visits include an animal science center studying animal feed as well as animal waste management, pro-

duction facilities, processing and slaughter plants, warehouses, and import and export facilities.

As one participant noted, the training has broad potential impact: “The topics on compliance, import/export, pathogen reduction, HACCP, and regulations are very important and can be adopted in our country to make our system more responsive to the challenging times of global competitiveness and become effective tools in promoting public health that will benefit our meat-consuming public.”

For more information on the program, go to: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OFO/HRDS/INTERNAT/seminar/overview.html> •

■ Pan-American Health Organization Tackles Food Safety

Thinking globally, working locally perfectly describes the job performed by the Pan American Institute for Food Safety, a special Center of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)-World Health Organization.

With a hemispheric mandate, the Institute works in consultation with 32 PAHO representatives in the Americas to develop programs that can be utilized in local areas.

One of the Institute's main functions is performed by the Social Communications and Education Project. Its aim is to promote safe handling of food.

When its materials are developed, the Education Project distributes them through a variety of government agencies and utilizes alliances with the media to promote food safety consumer-oriented messages.

But the Education Project also makes sure that its programs are grounded in good science. To define

populations at risk, it uses information from the Regional Epidemiological Surveillance System of Foodborne Diseases that compiles data from 24 countries of the Americas. This system showed, for example, that 40 percent of the reported outbreaks in the Americas occurred in homes.

A look at its Web site reveals a wide array of tools for international food safety educators.

Its home page—<http://www.panalimentos.org>—provides links to:

- **Canal Comunidad**—Focusing on consumer education, this site is a rich resource for fun, graphic educational campaigns. Topics include safe handling of eggs, use of food thermometers, food safety at home, and food safety in schools.

It has downloadable graphics, television public service announcements, and more.

- **Epi-ETA**—This is a network of foodborne disease epidemiologists. The network is designed to enhance collaboration and communication among people involved in foodborne diseases. The network provides a forum for sharing information and a platform for training.

The network is provided in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, GA.

- **Info Panalimentos**—This is an electronic newsletter issued weekly that highlights topics of interest including epidemiological information, legislation, education, and technology.

You can subscribe on-line:
<http://www.panalimentos.org/panalimentos/infopanalimentos4.asp> •

■ International Food Safety Icons

International food safety icons for food service are now available from the International Association of Food Protection (IAFP).

The icons are designed to provide an easily recognizable symbol that conveys a specific food safety message for food handlers of all nationalities. There are 11 icons symbolizing a variety of food safety “do’s and don’ts,” including:

- refrigeration/cold holding
- handwashing
- cooking
- hot holding

- cooling
- no bare hand contact.

The icons were developed in consultation with federal agencies including the Food Safety and Inspection Service, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Additional advisors included Cornell University; Virginia Tech; Darden Restaurants, Inc.; Marriott International Inc.; McDonald’s Corporation; Walt Disney World Company; and the International Food Safety Council of the National Restaurant Association.

The icons are copyrighted but available for free to educators. If used for commercial purposes, there is a fee-based license.

Low-resolution file formats of the icons are available from the IAFP Web site. A CD-ROM with high-resolution format for quality reproductions is available for \$25 including shipping and handling. Go to: <http://www.foodprotection.org> •

■ BAC! Has a Board

The Partnership for Food Safety Education, originators of the Fight BAC! program, recently elected the first officers of the board of directors.

Tim Hammonds, president of the Food Marketing Institute, will serve as chairman.

According to Hammonds, the board of directors will guide the Partnership's efforts to educate Americans about food safety prac-

tices. The Partnership, Hammonds explained, is a diverse group with resources to develop a wide range of programs and messages.

Created in 1997, the Partnership recently obtained nonprofit status as a 501c3, resulting in eligibility for foundation grants and government funds to support its programs.

For more information, go to: <http://www.fightbac.org> •



■ Cooking for Crowds

Food and fund-raising. They just go together. Hopefully, foodborne illness isn't also part of the package.

But the fact is that people fixing food for fund-raisers are generally untrained in how to keep large quantities of food safe. And, depending on the state, fund-raisers may not be inspected by the local public health department.

To help out, Penn State has developed a unique curriculum package designed specifically for nonprofit organizations and targeting potential problem areas.

The package, "Cooking for Crowds: A Volunteer's Guide to Safe Food Handling," is a 108-page, 3-color manual. It can be ordered for \$9 or downloaded for free from: <http://www.cookingforcrowds.psu.edu/>

The safe food handling information in the package is similar to that recommended to commercial food establishments, but it's been adapted to meet the specific needs of nonprofit audiences.

Chapters in the manual provide food safety strategies addressing common problem areas, including: buying, storing, and serving; bake sales; barbecues; and sub and sandwich sales.

The package was developed by Dana McElroy, a food safety specialist in the Department of Food Science, and a committee of 10 cooperative extension agents. The package was pilot tested in 22 workshops involving more than 300 participants.

The pilot testing revealed the challenges food managers faced because of lack of funding for new equipment and resistance on the part of volunteers.

As a result, the final curriculum package was modified to include sections with advice for overcoming volunteers' resistance and providing a variety of resources for low-cost food safety equipment.

The pilot testing also showed that the training made a difference, according to McElroy. The top three changes in behaviors were:

- Using food thermometers—21 percent used them before the workshop; 63 percent after.
- Calibrating thermometers—16 percent calibrated before the workshop; 61 percent after.
- Using ice water bath for cooling—34 percent before the workshop; 48 percent after. •

■ EdNet—Monthly E-Newsletter

Too much to read and not enough time? You need EdNet, the National Food Safety Educator's Network electronic newsletter focusing on activities of government agencies.

The newsletter editors do all the reading for you—scanning new government initiatives, major food safety listserves, and government publications. Then they sum it all up in a neat package that comes to you electronically each month. And it's free.

In the past two years subscribers have increased from 1,800 to 5,000.

E-mail to: listserv@foodsafety.gov

Leave the subject area blank. In the message area type: Subscribe EDNET-L "firstname lastname" (substituting your first and last names!)

You can also subscribe directly online at: <http://www.foodsafety.gov/~dms/infonet.html>

For your convenience, EdNet-L archives are available at: <http://www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/ednet.html> •

Extension's Disaster Education Network

In spring 2003, a dam burst in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The flooding caused a loss of power that could last a month. How does a community get along without power for a month? And keep food safe?

One resource is the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN). The Web-based network provides a database of disaster assistance resources and, uniquely, a network of disaster assistance contacts.

Through a limited access listserv, extension agents can pose questions to other agents throughout the country. The cooperative extension agent in the Upper Peninsula, for example, explains the problem on the listserv: extension agents in Louisiana, with experience in flooding disasters, provide hands-on advice.

Mark Hansen, Extension Coordinator of Emergency Management Programs at Michigan State University, teamed with others

"We're not there to take the place of the emergency workers. We don't provide medical care, direct traffic, or put out fires. But we are there as educators. We help people prepare for disasters and we help people put their lives together again after disasters."

—Mark Hansen

in the Mid-West to create EDEN.

Today, the network is a multi-state effort by university extension services across the country to provide disaster assistance resources and

information on a wide variety of topics—including food safety.

Since 9/11, citizens and emergency responders are realizing that the information and networks that are useful for floods, tornadoes, or hurricanes are also useful for bioterrorism, according to Hansen.

Through the EDEN network, Hansen explained, "we have a point of contact in each participating state. They are the starting point. Extension agents are heavily networked in local communities. They have contacts with community leaders, the media, and they are linked to expert resources at the universities.

"We're not there to take the place of the emergency workers. We don't provide medical care, direct traffic, or put out fires. But we are there as educators. We help people prepare for disasters and we help people put their lives together again after disasters," he explained. For more information, go to: <http://www.agctr.lsu.edu/eden> •

Healthy Pets, Healthy People

Sometimes our pet pals can give us more than their love. Unfortunately, our pets can be a source of infection, including foodborne illness.

Case control studies from FoodNet have pointed to contact with animals as a risk factor for *Salmonella* and *E. coli*.

Keeping safe is easy, however. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a new Web site with tips.

Go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets> •

Pets and Pregnancy

Pets and food come into the picture again when it comes to pregnant women.

"Toxoplasmosis: An Important Message for Women," released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, explains why a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii* can cause a serious infection in women who are pregnant. It can be transmitted by cats, contaminated soil, and food.

A pregnant woman can pass the infection to her unborn child. After birth, the child may develop serious complications, such as blindness or mental retardation.

How do people get sick?

If the parasite is in a cat's feces, it can contaminate a person's hands or garden soil. If the feces is eaten by other animals, such as pigs or sheep, the parasite can be passed to them. If people eat these meats under-cooked, they could become ill.

Staying safe is easy and kitty doesn't need to go. Safety tips include wearing gloves while changing kitty litter boxes and while working in gardens--and thoroughly cooking meat.

To learn more, go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/toxoplasmosis/ToxoWomen.pdf> •

How To Keep in Touch With Food Safety Education Information

The Food Safety Educator

This free quarterly newsletter reports on new food safety educational programs and materials as well as emerging science concerning food safety risks. It is distributed to 11,000 educators throughout the country, including public health offices, extension educators, industry, and consumer groups.

To subscribe: provide your full name, organization name, & mailing address.

- Write to: USDA/FSIS/Food Safety Education, Mail Stop 5268, Sunnyside Ave., Beltsville, MD 20705, or
- Fax your request to: (301) 504-0204, or
- E-mail your request to: fsis.outreach@usda.gov
- The newsletter is also available on the FSIS Web site: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/educator/educator.htm>

On the Web

- USDA/Food Safety and Inspection Service
<http://www.fsis.usda.gov>
- Thermy™ Web page
<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/thermy>
- FightBAC!™
<http://www.fightbac.org>
- Gateway to Government Food Safety Information
<http://www.foodsafety.gov>
- FDA/Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov>
- USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety>



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Please feel free to e-mail comments or suggestions—fsis.outreach@usda.gov

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Other Resources

EdNet—a monthly electronic newsletter for food safety educators. To subscribe, send an e-mail message to: Listserv@foodsafety.gov. Send the message: Subscribe EDNET-L firstname lastname

foodsafe—an online electronic discussion group. To join, go to: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodborne>

Toll-free—USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), for the hearing-impaired (TTY) 1-800-256-7072

Food and Drug Administration's Outreach and Information Center 1-888-SAFEFOOD