



## Food is safer in Wyoming thanks to UW CES and its partners

Thanks to the Wyoming Food Safety Coalition and leadership from UW CES, hundreds of food workers statewide are handling food more safely.

### Situation

The microbial contamination of food is a serious public health problem. Each year in the U.S. foodborne diseases cause approximately 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths. With approximately 60 percent of foodborne illness outbreaks nationwide attributable to food-service establishments, food-service personnel are the key to reducing the risk of foodborne illness.

The Wyoming Food Safety Coalition (WFSC) is a multi-institutional, multi-disciplinary partnership that has become the primary source of food-safety education throughout the state. The heart of WFSC is a core of locally trained teams, most of which include a county-based UW CES FCS educator\* and a health inspector from either the Wyoming Department of Agriculture or a local city/county health department or both. These teams plan and conduct a wide variety of educational programs. With guidance from WFSC's board of directors, UW CES\* has the primary role in coordinating and supporting team activities. U.S. Department of Agriculture grants helped establish WFSC, and workshop registration fees now fund it along with supplemental grants from agencies like the Food and Drug Administration.

In fiscal year 2003,

- Coalition team members trained 1,183 food handlers in the following workshops: Basic — 193, Intermediate — 718, Advanced — 100, and ServSafe — 172.
- In-house trainings reached 490 individuals.
- Consumer programs and displays reached 1,125 and 2,800 individuals, respectively.

### Impacts:

Thanks to the Wyoming Food Safety Coalition and leadership from UW CES, hundreds of food workers statewide are handling food more safely. Based on data from a 2001 evaluation project conducted by UW CES for WFSC, this year's 990 participants in WFSC's "Going for the Gold" (intermediate and advanced) and ServSafe workshops are estimated to have made the following changes:

- 960 (97 percent) made at least one change related to cleanliness like washing their hands more often.

- 792 (80 percent) made at least one change related to cooling food like putting food into shallow containers or cutting meat into smaller pieces before putting it in the refrigerator.
- 772 (78 percent) made at least one change related to food preparation like preventing cross contamination by keeping raw meats, cooked foods, and fresh produce separated.
- 743 (75 percent) made at least one change related to other miscellaneous areas like monitoring critical control points more closely.
- 693 (70 percent) made at least one change related to cooking food like using a stove or microwave as opposed to a steam table to reheat food.

**Success story** – A registered dietitian who received an intermediate level “Going for the Gold” disk as part of WFSC’s Food and Drug Administration-funded project shared this reaction:

“I have used it for in-service training of food service personnel in nursing homes I work with in Wyoming. Recently I have taken the liberty of using it with some facilities I work with in Montana. I find it to be a great tool to use for small groups. By using the PowerPoint program right on the screen of my notebook computer, I do not have access to a projector. Now I have supplied a copy of the disk to each facility for its use in a similar manner for training new employees when they arrive and for reviewing with current staff members annually. Thanks for a great tool.”

Improved food-handling behaviors such as those estimated to have been made by workshop participants increase the likelihood that food served in Wyoming is safe, and, therefore, decrease the risk of foodborne illness.

- UW CES FCS educators who were members of the Wyoming Food Safety Coalition during all or most of the year included: Donna Birkholz, Barb Daniels, Patti Griffith, Vicki Hayman, Phyllis Lewis, Mary Martin, Stella McKinstry, Linda Melcher, Christine Pasley, Suzy Pelican, Virginia Romero-Caron, and Denise Smith. Beth Kamber is the project associate for the coalition.

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