ABSTRACT

A trend toward tightening sanitation regulations is spreading across the nation. Supported by an increasing number of health jurisdictions at all levels (city, county, and state) and by the industry's customers in every state, new regulations are becoming a way of life for every restaurateur. Courses at all degrees of technical specificity, length and cost have appeared, culminating in what has been called "cross-country chaos."

The National Institute for the Food Service Industry (NIFI) course, "Applied Foodservice Sanitation," meets the FDA's recently-issued recommendations in every respect and is finding increased acceptance each day. It serves as the basis for the Illinois mandatory program and is accepted as one means of obtaining certification in the other two state mandatory programs (Florida and Washington, D.C.). Statewide voluntary programs are in full operation in Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, and Massachusetts and have started in Hawaii, South Carolina, Southern California, and Pennsylvania. Pilot programs are underway in Indiana and Kentucky and have been approved for early implementation in the state of Washington. Approximately 7,000 foodservice managers and supervisors have been certified by NIFI, and more than 17,000 textbooks are in use. NIFI has been chosen by the Food and Drug Administration to develop a plan for implementing a uniform national foodservice sanitation training and certification program.

The National Institute for the Food Service Industry (NIFI) is supported by restaurateurs, associations, foodservice companies, distributors, and manufacturers. We have set as our goal nothing less than the professional development of foodservice management through education.

It is apparent that one of the biggest challenges facing the foodservice industry is insuring that the eating-out public is protected from the hazards of foodborne illness. We have always had this requirement. But a number of factors in today's world have sharpened the urgency of meeting it. Customers, more consumerist-minded than ever, want it. Environmentalists and sanitarians want it. Responsible industry leaders want it. And now, most importantly, public health departments, city councils, state legislatures and the federal government want it.

A trend toward strengthening sanitation regulations is spreading across the nation. Supported by an increasing number of health jurisdictions at all levels (city, county, and state) and by the industry's customers in every state, new regulations are becoming a way of life for every foodservice operator.

The major focus of most of the changing regulations is a new one and, in principle, a good one. They focus on management and the manager's professional qualifications to protect the public in a clean and sanitary operation. Going back to the recommendations of the 1971 National Conference on Food Protection, held in Denver under the sponsorship of the American Public Health Association and the FDA, they recognize that the manager is the key, that he must be trained and that his qualifications should be demonstrated.

FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY RESPONSIBLE FOR SANITATION

That conference in 1971 ended with the responsibility of sanitation being that of the foodservice industry. Foodservice management personnel must be more closely involved in sanitation. Manager certification is the way to accomplish this objective. Through foodservice manager certification we can provide foodservice management personnel with the education tools they need to enable them to self-inspect themselves and carry on the training of their employees. Secondly, maintenance of a high level of sanitation can be achieved in the foodservice operation with less governmental control. If the manager knows how and why sanitation is important a cleaner operation will exist. This objective can only help the sanitarian as he can communicate more effectively with the certified manager, making the sanitarian's job a little easier, and more importantly, more rewarding.

While sanitation is not the most exciting part of an industry which the public considers glamorous, it is being moved by events to the top of the business agenda. It could hardly not be so when essentially every state health department is looking at the subject with a new interest. In several cities (including Chicago), in dozens of counties, and in three states to date (Illinois, Florida, and the District of Columbia) mandatory manager certification has been enacted. Elsewhere, the existence or the threat of mandatory certification has resulted in establishment of voluntary certification programs. We in NIFI are cosponsors, with state restaurant associations and health departments, of statewide voluntary programs in 10 states.

But publicity has also played a part. Intense coverage by the news media in many cities is fanning the flames of public concern. Newspapers and television stations in New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Cleveland, and Boston have been quick to point out consumer interest in
foodservice sanitation. In Miami, Wichita, South Bend, Los Angeles — all over the country — there have been restaurant kitchen exposures.

Some in the foodservice industry have shuddered at the fear generated by this publicity. Foodservice operators have nightmares about being put out of business by foodborne illness. Certainly, the operations whose unsanitary kitchens have appeared on television have suffered marked loss of customers, and in several instances, they have never recovered.

PROGRAM FOR EDUCATION

Yet, the most sensible reaction is not fear but an emphasis on a professional program for education and training of foodservice managers. It takes careful, trained people to insure the prevention of foodborne illness.

Overall, results of this publicity have been varied, including establishment of firmer inspection procedures and heightened self-inspection programs by foodservice operators. But it has also brought the threat of proliferation of numerous and widely differing and expensive sanitation education programs.

Foodservice manager certification courses at all degrees of technical specificity, length, and cost have appeared, culminating in, what has been called “cross-country chaos.” Some of the training programs are elementary food handler training courses. It is hard to imagine how some of these programs could meet the foodservice manager’s needs for understandable operations-centered knowledge.

To help alleviate some of the confusion, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has recently published a brochure, “Food Service Manager Training and Certification Program,” containing recommendations for a training course to improve food protection practices in foodservice establishments. It is, of course, not directive to the states, but it will be highly influential. Included are FDA recommendations for implementation of a course, the course outline, tuition, facilities, course materials, instruction, and certification.

Specifically, the brochure says: “with the increased emphasis on training, consideration is being given that: (a) the manager who demonstrates sufficient competence in the sanitary operation of a foodservice establishment should be certified; (b) training and certification criteria should be uniform across the nation; and (c) uniform training and certification should result in reciprocity between governmental agencies and within industry.”

THE NIFI COURSE

The NIFI course, “Applied Foodservice Sanitation” meets the FDA recommendations in every respect, and we are finding increased acceptance each day. It serves as the basis for the Illinois mandatory program and is accepted as a means of obtaining certification in the other two state mandatory programs (Florida and Washington, D.C.). Statewide voluntary programs are in full operation in Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, and Massachussetts and have started in Hawaii, Southern California, and Pennsylvania. Pilot programs have been conducted in Indiana and Kentucky, and have been approved for early implementation in the State of Washington. Approximately 7,000 foodservice managers and supervisors have been certified by NIFI, and more than 17,000 textbooks are in use — in these programs, in colleges, and in home study. And while mandatory certification and the threat of mandatory certification have resulted in some programs, we must certainly point out that some excellent voluntary certification programs have developed from genuine interest among industry leaders in upgrading foodservice through education. We believe that mandatory and voluntary training and certification programs can work together effectively if they are based on an agreed national standard uniformly applied. This will, in my opinion, make reciprocity possible and possession of a valid certificate an employment requirement in much of our industry, commercial and institutional.

The National Institute for the Foodservice Industry has been chosen by the Food and Drug Administration to develop a plan for implementing a uniform foodservice sanitation training and certification program. Currently, NIFI is engaged in gathering and assembling information for a “status report” on various types of foodservice owner/operator/manager training activities which lead to certification. After examination and evaluation of these programs it will be NIFI’s responsibility to recommend to the Food and Drug Administration a national model program.

NIFI is in the progress of collecting information on foodservice management training programs now in existence in various parts of the United States, as well as throughout the world. The input of professional sanitarians is vital, for only through assistance and guidance of sanitarians will come a uniformity and consistency in certification programs. Cooperation is the key — industry, education, and sanitation.