Sanitation Training for Food Service Managers — A Must!

A. SIDNEY DAVIS
Division of Food Service
Food and Drug Administration
Washington, D.C. 20204

(Received for publication June 10, 1976)

ABSTRACT

In the past two decades, growth of the foodservice industry has been sensational, and this means greater opportunities for consumers to become victims of foodborne illness. Safety of food is a responsibility of the industry, and establishment managers carry the burden of that responsibility. Sanitation training for foodservice managers offers great promise for improving food protection. Industry must assume the lead role in sanitation training, with cooperation and support of regulatory agencies.

At its annual Restaurant Show in Chicago during May, 1976 the National Restaurant Association announced some business achievements of the food service industry and some projects for the future of this dynamic industry. Gross sales for the industry reached 64 billion dollars in 1974. For 1975, gross sales are estimated at 72 billion dollars, a 12.5% increase in one year. Sales in 1976 are expected to reach 80 billion dollars; in 1980, 100 billion dollars.

In 1975, 40% of the family food budget was spent for food eaten away from home. By 1980, it is expected that one of every two dollars spent for food will be spent for food eaten away from home.

There are some 600,000 public and institutional food service establishments in this country, employing about 8 million full-time and part-time persons. The industry ranks first in employment, and if not already, will soon rank first in the U.S. in retail sales.

Industry growth in the past two decades has been sensational, and to those of us concerned with public health, this means increased opportunities for the consumer to become a victim of foodborne disease. Industry growth and greater public contact means that we must be more conscious of public health considerations.

RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

Agencies responsible for overseeing sanitation in the diverse and entrepreneurial food service industry have a myriad of problems. Many operate with inadequate resources, or under laws that are virtually unenforceable, or in an environment of general apathy. One might conclude that inspection routines of many public health agencies serve only as an infrequent reminder to the restauranteur that he should indeed feel responsible for assuring safe food for his customer. My point is that even the best of regulatory agencies cannot assure safe food in eating establishments. This responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of the industry, and industry management personnel must carry the burden.

INDUSTRY MUST CARRY BURDEN

Many persons will argue that growth of the food service industry heralds more problems in sanitation and greater risks of foodborne illness. I do not subscribe to this. The industry now attracts well-educated young people who already know, or can readily learn, the fundamentals of food protection. Much of the industry growth is accounted for in the emergence of multi-unit operations, or chains. Most of the large chains have quality control and sanitation staffs that develop procedures, provide training, and monitor operations to assure safe food-handling. Smaller chains may not be able to support a full-time professional staff, but can provide essential training and can monitor their operations to assure safe food handling. I believe that, on the whole, industry is improving significantly its capability to provide safe food to the public.

It seems obvious to me that many regulatory agencies should modify their approach to regulating food service sanitation so as to maximize cooperation of the industry. By this I mean regulatory agencies should find time in their schedules to work with industry and individual firms toward improvement. There is a need for open and constructive dialogue. One medium for such dialogue is a cooperative effort to provide sanitation training for food service managers.

SANITATION TRAINING

We have taught various trade skills in classrooms and on-the-job for as long as public eating establishments have existed, but only in recent years have we become...
seriously interested in teaching the fundamentals of food protection. A few years ago, we changed our emphasis in sanitation training from the food handlers to the owners, operators, and managers. This makes sense! The manager should know sanitation and proper food protection as well as he knows any other facet of his job. If he knows it, he can teach his work force, and integrate food safety considerations into his daily work routines. Having done this, he can do a bit of self-inspection each day to assure that what he taught is being done effectively. This is what manager training and certification is all about.

**TRAINING AND CERTIFYING MANAGERS**

For the past 4 years, the Food and Drug Administration has promoted the concept of training and certifying food service managers. Several good programs have already been initiated in various sections of the country, and more are starting each year. In February of 1976, the Food and Drug Administration announced its recommendations for a uniform training course. We now have entered into contract with an industry educational foundation to develop a national plan for implementing the training and certification of managers.

Do not be lulled into thinking that conducting a national program is easy. The thought of one to two million food service managers completing a course in sanitation is mind-boggling. When one considers certification of these managers, some questions arise. On what basis is he certified? For how long is he certified? If certification is good for a limited number of years, how is he recertified? Who maintains records of all these certifications? When certified in one jurisdiction, will the certification be recognized in other jurisdictions? These are hard questions that must be answered as we pursue this worthwhile program.

Despite any problems we foresee with it, I think this training is essential. Experience shows the training to be a real eye-opener to food service managers of long experience. It shows that many managers do not understand the potential within their own establishment for serving unsafe food. Teaching this awareness of the potential is a specific objective in training.

FDA recommends that sanitation training and certification programs be co-sponsored, as a minimum, by industry and the cognizant regulatory agency. We like to see others, such as educational institutions and consumer groups, involved in the program. A concerted effort is required to make a success of the program.

Earlier, I stated that FDA has entered into contract with an industry educational foundation to develop a national plan for training and certification of managers. In my judgement, this puts the program in proper perspective, with industry assuming a leadership role and government an assistance role. Industry has demonstrated sufficient capability and interest to successfully carry out the program. In so doing, industry is assuming its responsibility to assure that proper food protection practices are used universally, and that risk of foodborne illness is minimized. Public health officials should concurrently modify their approaches as necessary to provide all reasonable assistance to that end. While not a panacea, the training and certification of food service managers offers great promise for improving food protection in the food service industry.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**