Minnesota Food Safety and Defense Task Force

Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2026

Today's meeting was held in Room B144 of the Orville L. Freeman Building, 625 Robert Street North, St. Paul, and via the Microsoft Teams Video Conferencing platform.

The meeting was called to order at 1:05 PM.

Members present included: Amy Johnston, Angie Wheeler, Julia Selleys, Steve Barthel, Erin Mertz, Steven Foster, Stanley Osuagwu, Charlie Lucas, Carrie Rigdon, Patrice Bailey, and Luke Meier.

Visitors present included: Abigail Brinkmeier, Dan Opsahl, Kathy Zeman, Jane Jewett, Alida (Sorenson) Siebert, Charles Dierker, Todd Dang, Sadie Gannett, Autum Stoll, Katherine Simon, David Smith, Jodie Burke, Greg Able, Jennifer Stephes, Meghan Melheim, Ben Miller, Lillian Otieno, Andrew Siira, Mariah Stinson, Megan Jansa, Kip Fondrick, Keri Plude, Conner McLaughlin, Gretchen Lindahl, Barb Schroeder, Kim Carlton, Lisa Wetzel, Gabriel Wilson, Jill Herberg, David Smith, and Natasha Hedin

1. **Dates and links**

    - Registration Open: Best Practices for Managing Food Allergens in a Food Processing Space
    - Grant Funding Expanded – FSPCA Food Traceability and Human Food Lead Instructor Courses
    - Food Traceability Rule – Virtual Class

2. **The minutes from the January 2026 meeting were accepted with no comments.**

3. **Member and Visitor Updates**

    Julia Selleys, (Hennepin County): Julia shared that several local public health agencies, including Hennepin County, are getting a new inspection software system. Hennepin County is also on a hiring freeze.

    Luke Meier (Northern Midwest Regional Council of Carpenters): Luke shared that the Controlling Contaminants training on February 5, 2026, was a success. They are holding another training course on May 28, 2026, in Rochester. Reach out to Luke for more information and to register.

Erin Mertz (Ecolab): Erin attended recent Institute for Food Safety and Health (IFSH) and Food Allergy Research and Resource Program (FARRP) meetings. There were multiple discussions around U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) changes, allergens, and "could contain" statements

Ben Miller (The Acheson Group): Ben and Elise Forward are Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance (FSPCA) lead instructors for the Food Traceability Rule. They will be hosting a virtual training starting April 28, 2026. See the dates and links above for more information and registration.

4. **Food Safety Training Course Design to Improve Learner Outcomes**
   Amy Johnston, University of Minnesota Extension, discussed her work on the program redesign for the Serve it Up Safely program for continuing education for Certified Food Protection Managers. Throughout 2025, she implemented changes to the courses to shift learner outcomes. Her presentation slides are attached.

5. **From Corporate to Corner Store: Retail Food Safety Practices in Small Businesses and How They Compare with Large Brands.**
   Carrie Rigdon, Research Scientist, Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO), provided a presentation on how small retail food businesses approach food safety and how their practices compare with those of large brands. Using survey data, her presentation highlighted what's working, where gaps remain, and how regulators and inspectors can best support food safety in day-to-day operations. Her presentation slides are attached

6. **Allergen Training Work Group Update – Amy Johnston, U of MN**
   The allergen training work group is planning for our June 2nd training/workshop, which will take place at Ecolab in Eagan, Minnesota. Workshop details and registration can be found on the U of M website (and the dates and resources links above).

7. **Food Innovation Team Update – Natasha Hedin, MDA and Kathy Zeman, Minnesota Farmers Market Association**
   - Six new members have been selected for the FIT. There are still two vacancies from the MDA and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) delegated agencies.
   - If you are interested in serving on the team, please reach out to Natasha Hedin.
   - There is one case waiting to be heard. Kathy and Jane will work with the Food Business Owner to complete the Pre-Screening Intake Form.

8. **Potential Items for July**
   - Improvements in MDA recall effectiveness checks.
   - Send additional topic ideas you have to Natasha Hedin.

Food safety training course design to improve learner outcomes

Food Safety and Defense Task Force meeting , 4/21/26

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Agenda

- Background information
- Project overview
- Examples
- Year-to-date outcomes
- Key takeaways

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Food Service Managers

- Entry-level education: high school diploma or equivalent.
- On-the-job training: short-term on-the-job training.
- Advance degrees or certificates common for institutional food service establishments.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024.

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Food manager communication and leadership styles

Managers who:

- Use an ethical leadership style develop employees who are more likely to speak up and take action to prevent a risky behavior.
- Prioritize food safety over productivity empower employees to suggest ways the food establishment can improve.
- Use of a prohibitive communication style can unintentionally isolate employees.

A key finding from the research was employees who feel secure and supported at work are more likely to adopt safe practices, hold each other accountable, and share their ideas.

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Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive domains

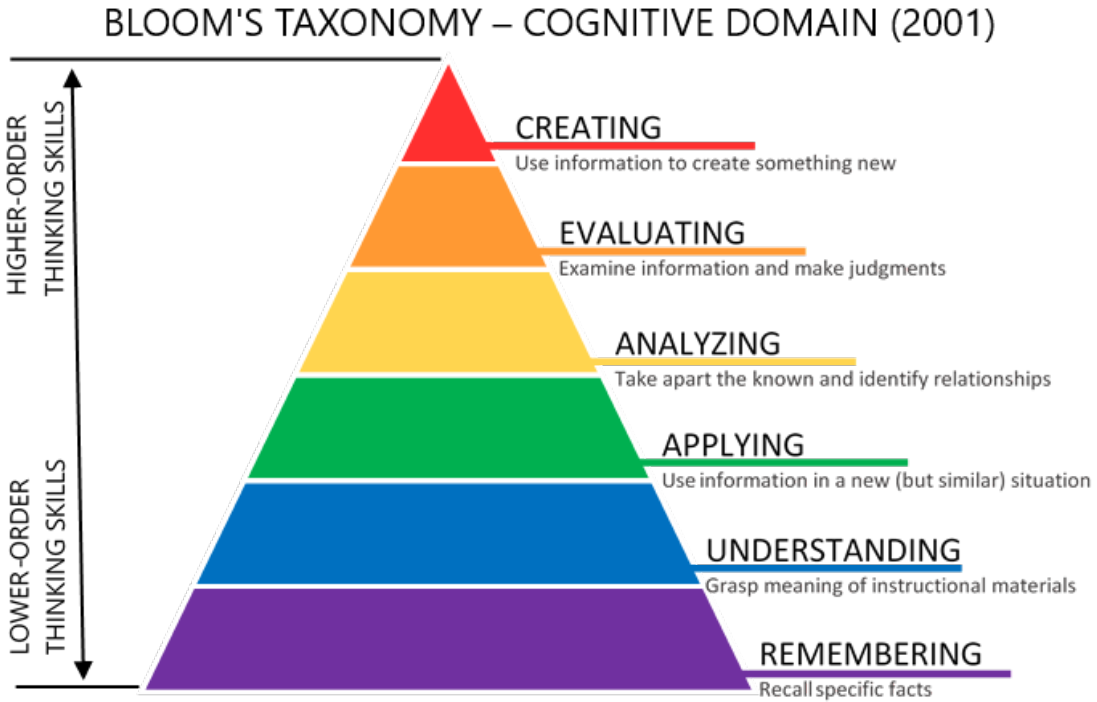

Image credit: University of Florida, Information Technology.

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Project goal

Use design elements and other strategies in the online, asynchronous Serve It Up Safely program courses to shift learner outcomes from remembering and understanding cognitive domains to the **apply, analyzing, evaluating,** and **creating** cognitive domains.

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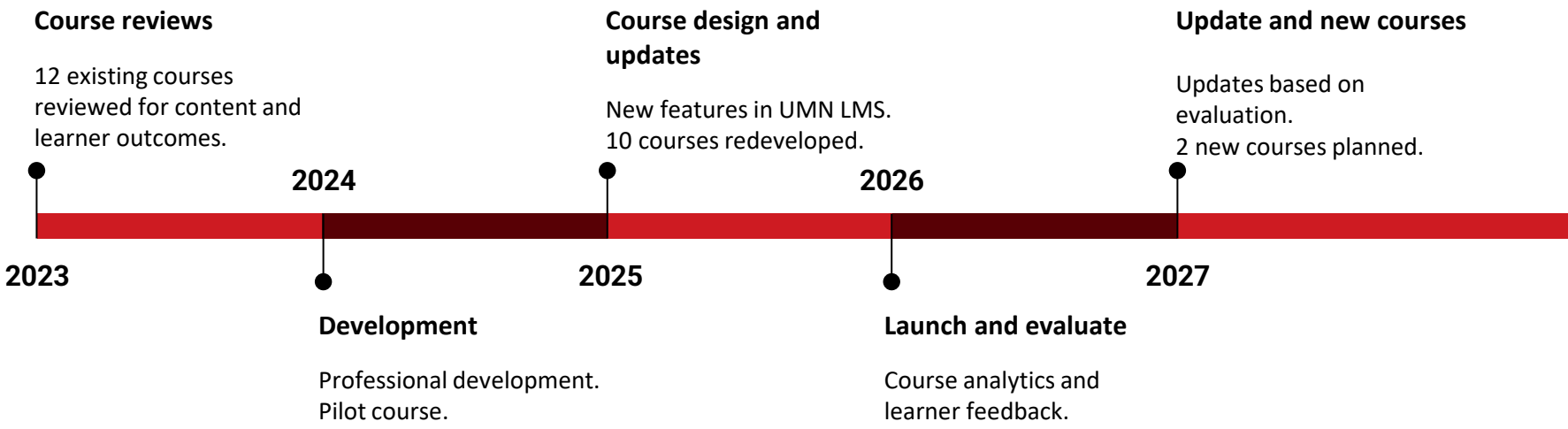
Project timeline



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Examples

- Dish machine: applying the information instead of recalling a specific temperature
- Handwashing: analyzing and generating ideas of how they could prevent the situation
- Disposable glove use: applying the information and formulating an approach to training
- Cooling food: applying the information and developing a procedure for a SSOP.
- Employee hygiene standards: developing a plan
- Scenarios and case studies for final certification quizzes

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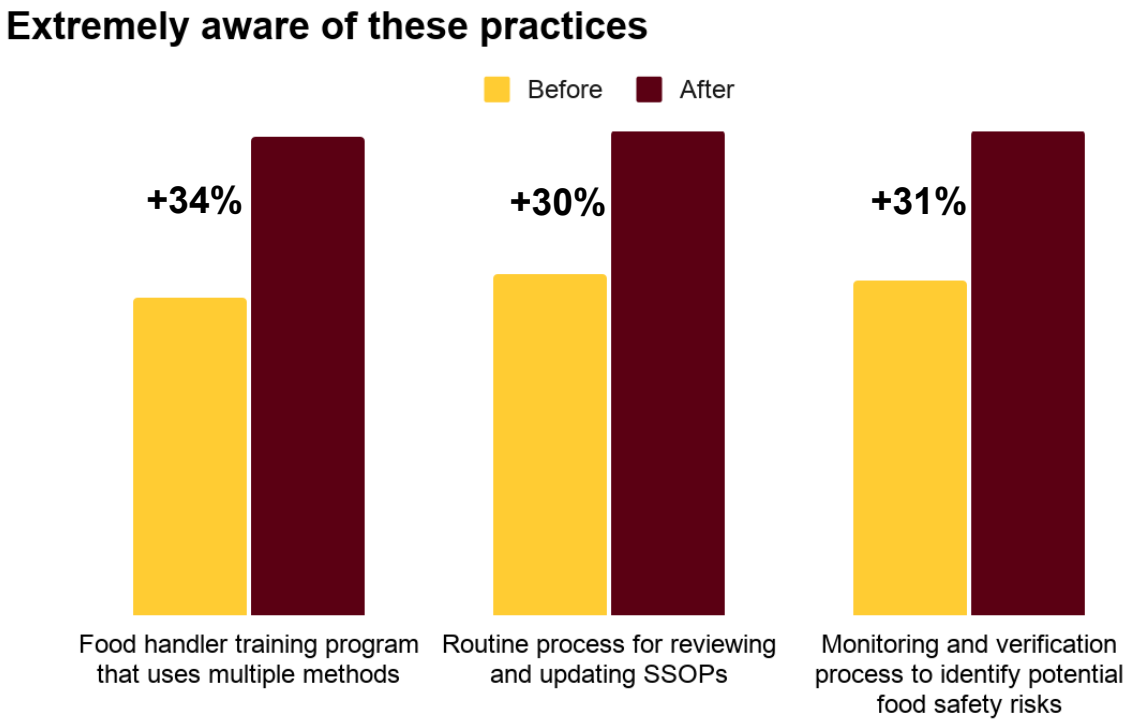
Change in awareness



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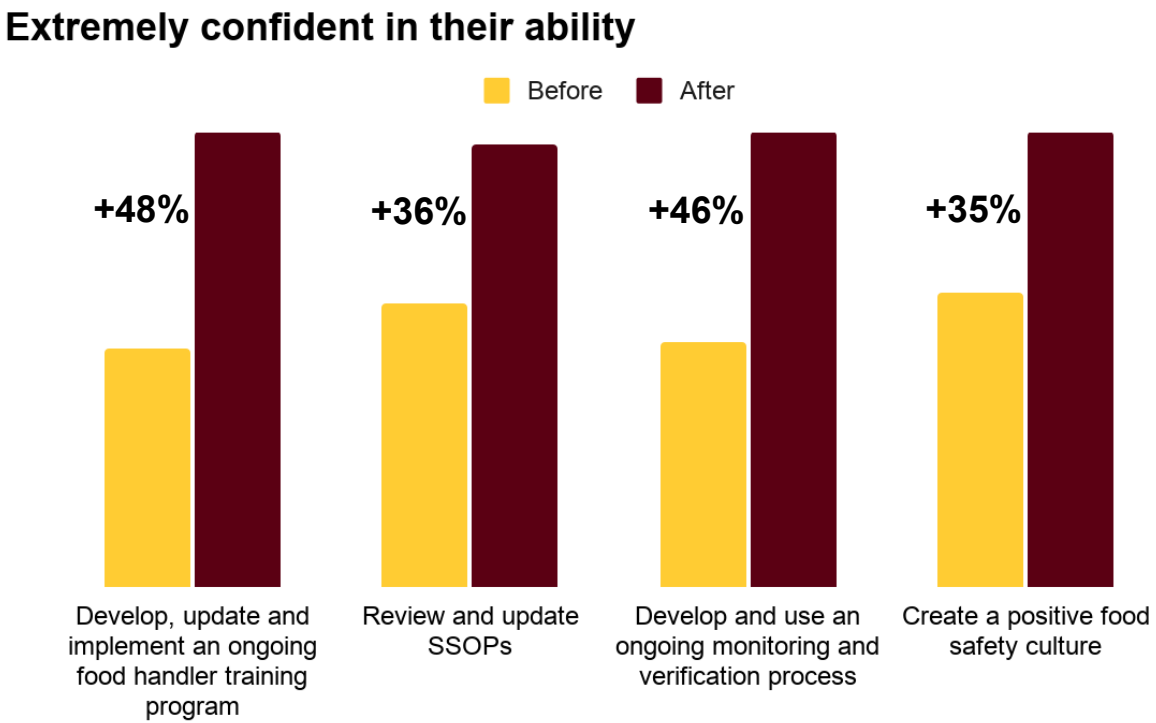
Change in confidence



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Planned changes in their operations

- What changes will you make to your current food handler training program?
- What updates do you plan to make to your SSOPs?
- How will you use the results from monitoring and verification process?
- How do you plan to promote safe food handling practices?

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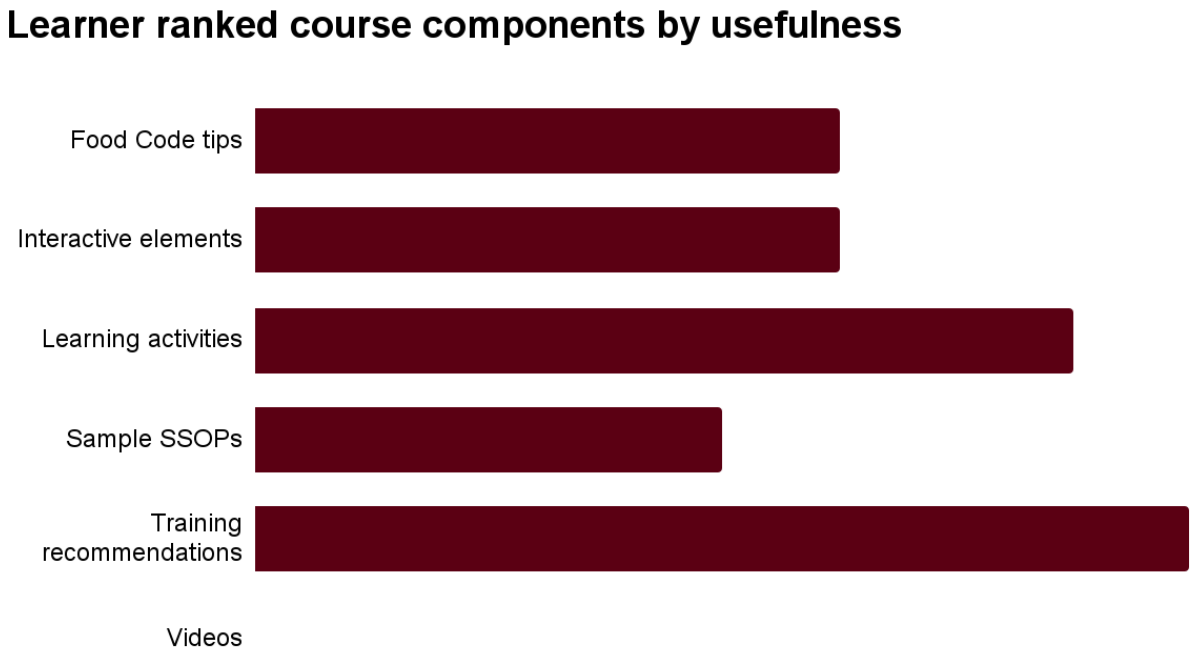
Course components



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Key takeaways

- Know your audience.
- Be mindful that you are not solely sharing information that they already know.
- Connect the information to their own operation.
- Provide opportunities to apply the information in a low-stakes environment.
- Teach them how to train and monitor food handlers in their operation.

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Questions?

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From Corporate to Corner Store:
Retail Food Safety Practices in Small Businesses and How They Compare with Large Brands

Carrie Rigdon, PhD | Research Director

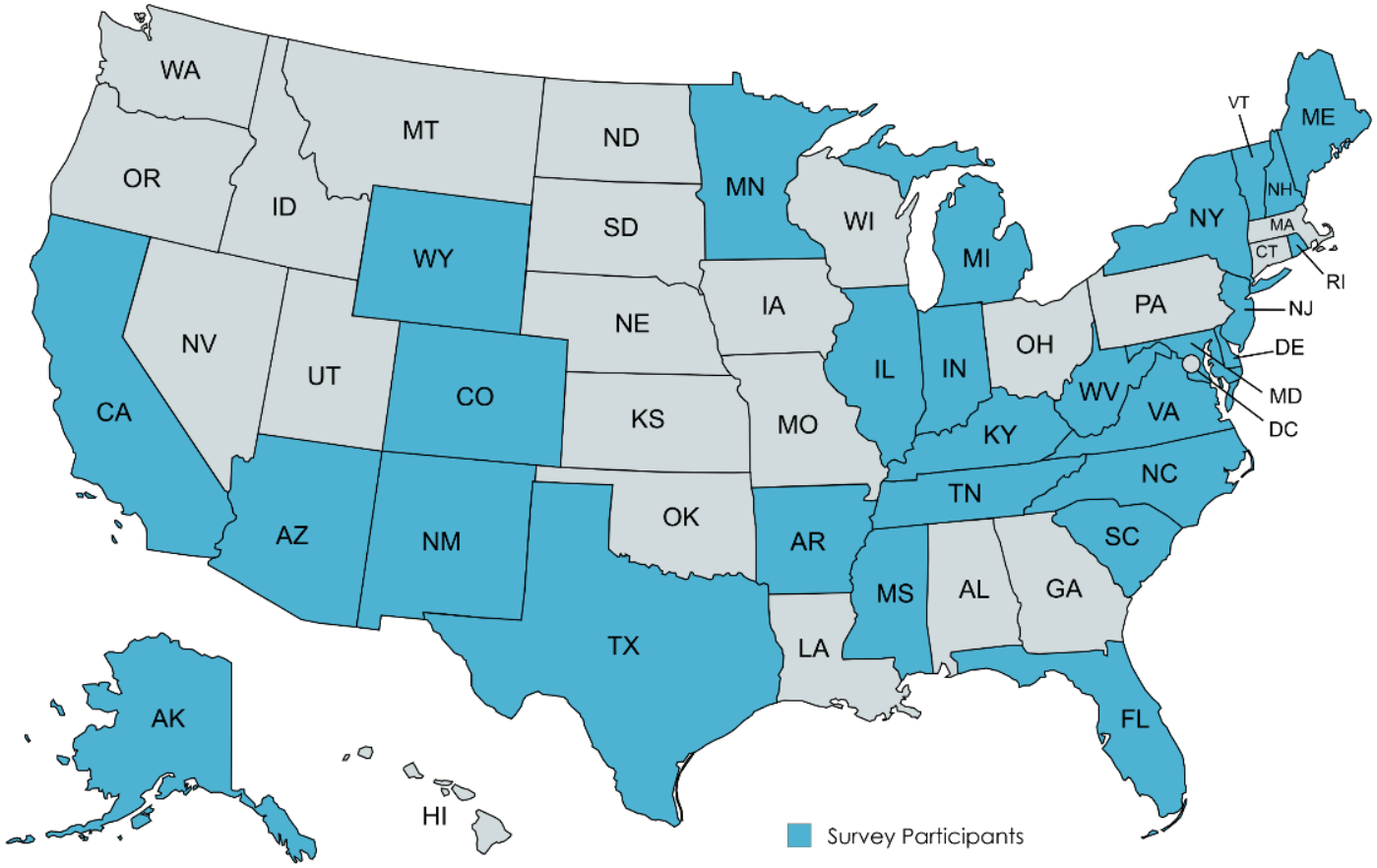
MN Food Safety & Defense Task Force

April 21, 2026

Why Focus on Small Businesses?

- Retail is a critical control point for preventing foodborne illness
- 90% of U.S. restaurants have < 50 employees
- Small businesses ≠ scaled down large brands

What We Studied – Survey Overview

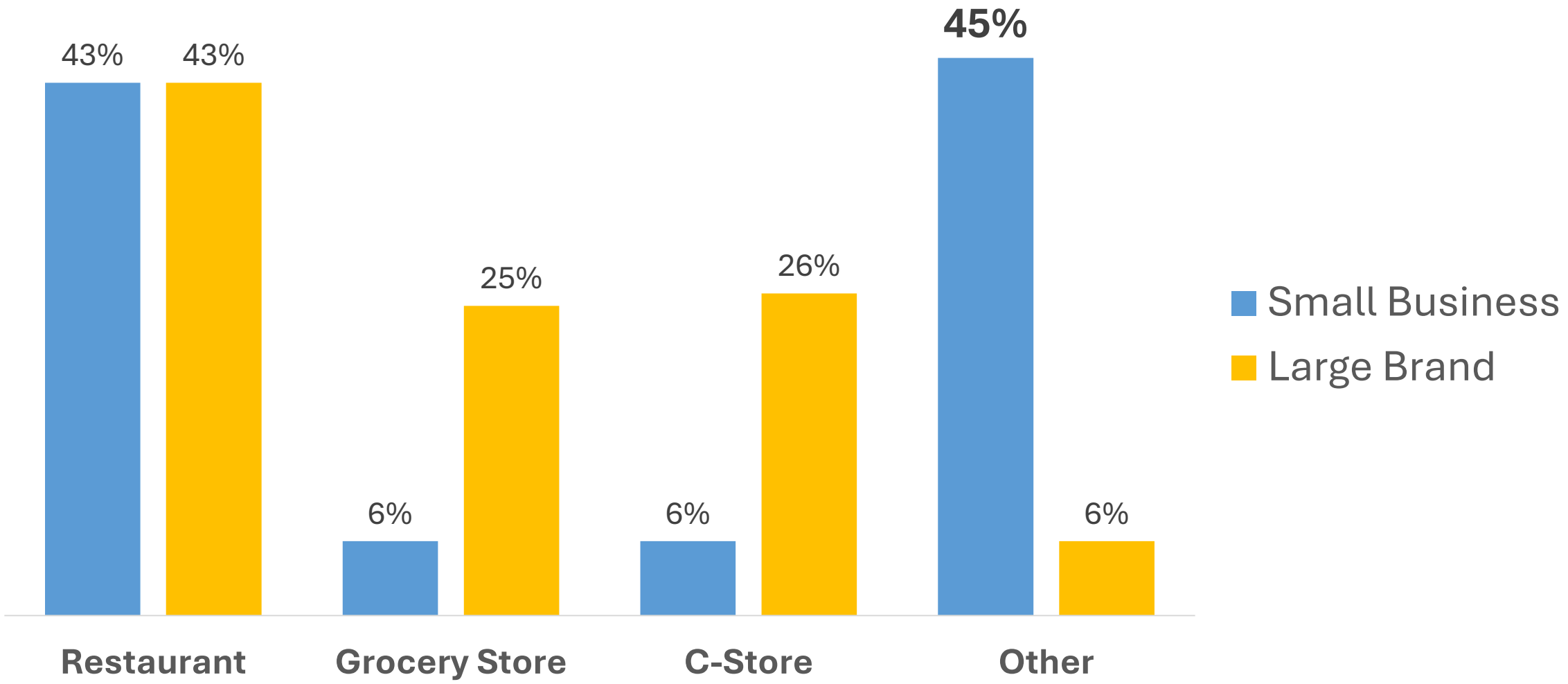


- 747 small businesses
- ≤ 50 employees
- 28 states
- Comparison with prior national large brand survey

Who These Small Businesses Are

- Single-unit, independent operations dominate
  - 74% independently operated
  - 75% single units
- Many don’t self-identify within typical labels
  - 45% selected “Other”
  - Mobile units
  - Concession stands
  - Coffee shops

How Small Businesses See Themselves



A Core Finding: Inspectors are a Key Source of Food Safety Support

- Inspector input shapes procedures, training & improvement
- Inspections cited as key assurance tool

A.I.-generated image

Evidence of Regulatory Reliance

- #1 source for ideas to improve food safety (85%)
  - #2: Food manager/handler training courses
- #1 source for food safety signs and training handouts (71%)
- 3rd most likely source of food safety procedures input (61%)
  - Owner (78%) and Managers (70%)

A.I.-generated image

Active Managerial Controls: What's Working

- Managers intervene when unsafe behavior is observed
  - 93% said they immediately intervene
- Managers model food safety behaviors
  - 68% role-model proper handwashing
- Leadership commitment is present

Food Safety Culture: The Good News

- Majority can define FSC
- Most demonstrate basic to advanced understanding
  - 88% demonstrated a good understanding in their definitions
- Accountability often shared among staff

Where the Gaps Are

- Stronger on visible, routine tasks (refrigeration checks, basic food handling)
- Weaker on system-based controls
  - Limited written procedures and policies
  - Minimal documentation
  - Less consistent monitoring of high-risk processes

FSMS – Employee Practices

Employee practices that keep food safe	Frequency, n	Percentage of Small Businesses (%)
Check refrigeration and freezer temperatures	694	93.5
Date mark foods	652	87.9
Use safe thawing processes	572	77.1
Monitor cooking temperatures	543	73.2
Keep thermometers calibrated	534	72.0
Prep food in small batches	523	70.5
Monitor cooling process	428	57.7
Do line checks of hot and cold holding temperatures	426	57.4
Monitor reheating	396	53.4
Check delivery temperatures	330	44.5
Keep temperature logs	284	38.3
Use time labels when holding food at room temperature	229	30.9
We do not serve foods that need temperature control	101	13.6
Other	21	2.8
Unsure	4	0.5
Total	**742**	

FSMS – Policies and Procedures

Written food safety procedures or policies	Frequency, n	Percentage of Small Businesses (%)
Cleaning and Sanitization Procedure	595	81.1
Personal Hygiene Standards	574	78.2
Pest Management Program	363	49.5
Allergen Control Procedure	347	47.3
Emergency Response Plan	322	43.9
Preventive Maintenance Procedure	293	39.9
Supplier/Vendor Approval Program	173	23.6
Equipment Design Standards	149	20.3
Facility Design Standards	127	17.3
None of the above	42	5.7
Unsure	41	5.6
Other	9	1.2
Not applicable	6	0.8
Total	**734**	

Training & Certification

- 98% report *some* training
- Only 58% require Food Manager Certification
  - → Compared to 93% of large brands
- 20% lacked a credential or were unsure if they had one
- Training by supervisor (58%) and in-house training were common (54%), but their effectiveness & consistency are unknown

Comparing Small Businesses with Large Brands

- Large Brands
  - Internal food safety teams
  - Third-party audits
  - Supplier audits

- Small Businesses
  - Inspectors
  - Informal systems
  - Owner-driven practices

Key Takeaways

Unique Characteristics and Challenges of Small Businesses

- Many small businesses self-identify as “other”
  - Harder to connect with sector-specific resources by trade associations, regulators
- Independent verification is uncommon
  - Lack of tools like HACCP plans (34%) and 3rd party audits (9%) may reflect limited access to technical assistance tailored for small operations

Considerable Reliance of Small Businesses on Regulatory Agencies and Food Inspectors

80% Cited health department **inspections as a key tool** for ensuring food safety

85% Reported seeking **improvement ideas** from their inspectors

71% Use food safety **signs and training materials** from their health department

61% **Rely on inspectors** to help shape their food safety procedures

Recommendations

1. Recognize and support the **regulatory role** in small business food safety
   - Expand inspector training to include coaching and consultative skills.
   - Provide inspectors with tools to deliver tailored, risk-based education during inspections.
   - Develop easy-to-use, validated training materials that inspectors can share on-site.

Recommendations

2. Reframe inspections for small businesses as **engaged, dialogue-based** public health interventions
   - Shift from a checklist mentality to a dialogue-based model that explores the “why” and “how” behind current practices.
   - Prioritize education and capacity-building over punitive measures, especially for first-time or low-risk violations.
   - Encourage inspectors to identify opportunities for improvement and co-create solutions with operators

Recognition & Thank You

- Deanna Copeland
- Sally Flowers

Carrie Rigdon
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Additional Information

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Food Safety Training

Food safety training provided to employees who handle food	Frequency, n	Percentage of Small Businesses (%)
Food Manager Certification training	427	57.9
Training by supervisor	427	57.9
In-house training	397	53.9
Food Handler Certificate class	381	51.7
Online training	173	23.5
Trained by employees other than supervisor	172	23.3
External training	62	8.4
None	8	1.1
Unsure	5	0.7
Total	**737**	

Percentages add up to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

FSMS – Sources of Input

Input used to create food safety procedures	Frequency, n	Percentage of Small Businesses (%)
Owner	547	77.9
Managers	488	69.5
Health department/inspectors	431	61.4
Employees who handle food	334	47.6
Shift leaders/person in charge	301	42.9
Food safety training companies	182	25.9
Provided by corporate/my company	102	14.5
Third-party auditors	56	8.0
Industry trade associations	48	6.8
Extension service/universities	15	2.1
Unknown	5	0.7
Other	5	0.7
Not applicable	2	0.3
Total	**702**	

Management Practices

Management Practice	Small Businesses	Large Brands
Consistently model correct food safety behaviors for employees	68%	65%
Immediately intervene after observing unsafe food handling practices	93%	81%
Provide rewards or recognition to employees for good food safety practices	14%	46%

Who is Accountable for Food Safety?

Who is accountable for food safety in establishments?	Frequency, n	Percentage of Small Businesses (%)
Managers	505	82.0
Owner	471	76.5
Employees who handle food	439	71.3
Shift leaders/person in charge	372	60.4
Health department/inspectors	147	23.9
Third-party auditors	31	5.0
Unsure	2	0.3
Total	**616**	

Percentages add up to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

Food Safety Improvement Sources

Sources of ideas to improve food safety	Frequency, n	Percentage of Small Businesses (%)
Health department/inspectors	521	84.9
Food manager/food handler training courses or continuing education	453	73.8
Manager suggestions	346	56.4
Employee suggestions	332	54.1
Observations at other food businesses	323	52.6
Internet/social media	166	27.0
Industry trade association	161	26.2
Unsure	14	2.3
Other	12	2.0
Total	**617**	

Percentages add up to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

Inspection Feedback

What would you change about the inspections done by your food inspector?	Frequency, n	Percentage of Small Businesses (%)
No change suggested	152	33.6
Compliments or positive feedback	91	20.1
Share more feedback, educate before you regulate (floors, walls, ceiling vs. risk-based)	45	10.0
Inspection format, style, or requirements	39	8.6
Timing of inspection visit	35	7.7
Forceful approach, poor attitude, ethical issues	27	6.0
More frequent inspection visits	24	5.3
Lack of consistency	20	4.4
Less frequent inspection visits	2	0.4
N/A, Unsure	34	7.5
Total	**452**	

Percentages add up to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

2023 Large Brand Survey

In what ways is your brand either superior to or deficient from the behaviors revealed by your colleagues?

By Mark S. Miklos, CP-FS, Advisory Partner, Active Food Safety; Elizabeth A. Nutt, M.P.H., Retail Food Safety Director, Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO); Steven Mandernach, J.D., Executive Director, AFDO; Susan W. Arendt, Ph.D., Professor, Iowa State University; and Yang Xu, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Hawaii at Mānoa

Although the U.S. food supply is considered one of the safest in the world, there are an estimated 9.4 million occurrences of foodborne illness each year.[1] Additionally, foodborne illness is estimated to cause more than 55,000 hospitalizations and more than 1,300 deaths

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