

# IMPACT



University of Idaho  
Cooperative  
Extension System

## “SERVE IT SAFELY” Food Safety Training

### *Situation*

Many entry level jobs for teens are in food service. Some new food service workers are not aware of basic safety guidelines for food handling, yet these workers are usually assigned jobs preparing food and dealing with customers directly. Small mistakes in food handling procedures can have severe health consequences for those who eat food contaminated with disease causing microorganisms. If a case of food borne illness was traced to a food service establishment, there would be profound economic repercussions.

Training food service workers is difficult to accomplish while on the job. Workers may be told how to do a specific job and not understand the importance of following exact directions. Or, workers may use less than adequate food preparation techniques learned at home. Either situation could potentially compromise the safety of commercially prepared food.

### *Our Response*

The University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System, in a cooperative effort with the Marketing Director at the Magic Valley Mall in Twin Falls, initiated a food safety training program for workers at all businesses in the mall Food Court. This was attempted after some food service practices were questioned.

The 2 1/2 hour program was offered to all businesses and mall Food Court employees,

during “off hours” for the convenience of the businesses. The Mall Marketing Director was informed of the program participants and certificates were given to all who completed the course.

The course was modeled after the “Food Safety for Food Service Supervisors” course developed by the University of Idaho Extension Food Safety Team, with Dr. Marilyn Swanson as team leader. A pre- and post- quiz was administered and results are being tabulated. Group participation was emphasized so that the instructor could help the participants apply the food safety guidelines directly to their jobs.

### Objectives of the “Serve It Safe” Training

- To inform participants of: the importance of their food handling procedures on the safety of the food they prepare; the economic impact of food safety mistakes of food service establishments; and their stake in maintaining the reputation of the business for which they work.
- To review basic food safety guidelines including the concept of potentially hazardous foods; basic sanitation; proper thawing and cooling procedures; recommended practices during preparation and service, and prevention of cross contamination.



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University of Idaho, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Idaho counties cooperating.

- To monitor participants understanding of concepts covered through learning activities and participation exercises.

## ***Achievements***

- Four training sessions were offered with 36 employees and business owners attending.
- Program outcome was evaluated and the following information was provided by the Magic Valley Mall Marketing Director:
- An initial survey was taken by the Mall with Food Court customers. "Two months after 'Serve It Safe' was implemented, a follow-up survey of 500 food business customers was conducted. This surveyed revealed that 58 percent of the customers were satisfied with the cleanliness of the restaurants and the quality of the food served -- an increase of 16 percent from prior surveys!"
- "To date, 74 percent of all food tenant employees have successfully completed the 'Serve It Safe' classes, as well as all Mall Food Court employees. And while food merchants were not initially enthusiastic about participating in the program, their attitude has experienced a 180 degree turnaround. Following the first series of classes, managers and owners began requesting a second series for the purpose of training new employees."
- Employees and owners participating in the class took a pre- and post-test of 9 questions. The average increase in score was 1.5 points from the pre- to post-test. One participant's score increases by 5 points,

2 increased 4 points, and 6 participants increased by 3 points.

- "As a result (of the class), health inspection violations are down significantly, with one Mall store receiving a perfect 100% rating. Currently, one merchant remains on the Health Department's 'watch' list, down from four merchants one year ago -- a clear improvement."
- The project was considered so successful by the Magic Valley Mall Marketing Director and Food Court business owners that the program was requested on an ongoing basis and it was written up and entered in an international mall competition for innovative programming. The program was a finalist in this contest.

## ***Future***

This training program will be offered on an ongoing basis by the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System, as requested by the Magic Valley Mall.

## ***For More Information***

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