

FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

PILOT SUMMARY & LESSONS LEARNED

ISFR FOOD SAFETY CULTURE WORKING GROUP

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The Food Safety Culture Working Group (FSC WG) of the Implementation Subcommittee for Food Regulation (ISFR) has completed a pilot on food safety culture under the action plan for Australia's Foodborne Illness Reduction Strategy 2018-2021+. This document is for external stakeholders and summarises the pilot's main activities and findings.

Aim and scope

The pilot aimed to develop a shared understanding of food safety culture across the food regulatory system and in food businesses. The pilot involved governments (states and local councils) and food service businesses (mostly small-to-medium enterprises). Food businesses were either chosen by governments or volunteered to participate. One of three focus areas was chosen by each state: preparing and serving raw and lightly cooked egg products, serving vulnerable populations, or allergen management.

Activities

1. A package of resources and tools was developed for potential national use for improving the understanding of food safety culture in the regulatory system and in food businesses. These included PowerPoints, animations, fact sheet, questionnaires, maturity matrix (a simple descriptive model to explain different maturity stages of food safety culture), and a behaviour guide (with advice for regulators to guide business culture improvements).
2. These resources were trialled in educating regulators and food service businesses in all six Australian states.
3. The assessment tools (matrix and behaviour guide) were trialled during interviews between regulators and food businesses, for regulators to gauge each business's knowledge of food safety risks and the maturity of their food safety culture.
4. Feedback was received from regulators on the resources, training and impacts on businesses.

Main findings

Training regulators – Overall, the project successfully provided a common baseline for training regulators on the importance of food safety culture in the regulatory environment. Regulator feedback:

- Training was fit for purpose and well targeted.
- All states reported an increased awareness, understanding of and commitment to food safety culture.
- Some regulators were less comfortable/ familiar with taking on an educator role with food businesses rather than a traditional inspector role.

Project resources – regulator feedback:

- Having national resources is valued for consistent information and showing a food business the food safety issue is broader than them.

- Having a package of resources is useful for regulators to be able to pick the most suitable guidance for each business they engage with.
- Short succinct messages and simple images are preferred for getting messages across to businesses.
- Longer, more technical information (e.g. raw egg guidance) is appreciated for educating/supporting regulators and more mature businesses.
- Resources in languages other than English would be useful for businesses.
- A self-assessment questionnaire for businesses to complete in their own time could be useful, especially where it could be discussed during routine inspections. An anonymous survey could enable more truthful feedback from staff.

Time allocation

- Finding time to complete training and business interviews was a major issue for both regulators and food businesses.
- Participation rates were higher where the activity was not voluntary.
- The interview proved a good opportunity to raise businesses' food safety awareness.
- Regulators appreciated the opportunity to engage with businesses other than for an inspection, to learn more about businesses' perspectives and culture, and identify ways to support improvements.
- Some regulators extended their activities outside the project (e.g. talking with businesses outside the project and producing short food safety videos).

Improvements in business behaviour

Regulators saw many improvements in business behaviour following the pilot's targeted conversations or education, even over a fairly short time (several months):

- Some businesses were seen to encourage others to complete training outside of the pilot.
- Some businesses openly acknowledged gaps in their food safety knowledge or practices, or a lack of commitment to food safety i.e. the pilot raised their risk awareness and consideration of their food operations.
- Overall, an improvement in businesses' culture maturity was observed in every state.
- Some businesses improved their management of food safety risks, by switching to lower risk products, adjusting their food processes to be safer, or starting to keep relevant records.

Conclusions

This project has started developing a shared understanding of food safety culture as a non-regulatory tool among regulators and food businesses. It has succeeded in:

- creating and trialling a national package of food safety culture tools and resources
- professionally developing regulators in all six states, raising the profile of and improving their understanding of food safety culture
- strengthening the understanding and management of food safety risks in at least some participating food businesses, demonstrated through improved practices.

Future opportunities

The working group recommended further opportunities to build on this promising start. For a successful positive shift in food safety behaviour, there needs to be a 'want to' on the part of both the regulator (as coach/mentor) and the food business.

Recommendations:

- Continue education and training of regulators in behavioural aspects of food safety management.
- Refine some project resources for use with very small businesses and in languages other than English.
- Broader sharing activities to include other business sectors and regulators.
- National forums and/or community of practice with regulators and industry, to share resources and findings from this project and other activities in food safety culture.

Resources developed/used by the project

Overarching documents to introduce the work and guide discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation on the project and its background (PowerPoint) - for LG and industry representatives
Supporting documents with more detail on food safety culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation and Webinar to guide discussion (PowerPoint) - for LG• Food safety culture 'At a glance' (FSANZ fact sheet) - for FB & LG• Animations - Introduction to food safety culture (FSANZ) - FB & LG
Supporting documents with more detail on raw egg preparation, allergen management or Listeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Raw Egg Guidelines - for FB• Australian Eggs raw egg product pamphlet - for FB• Presentation to educate businesses on raw egg products (PowerPoint) - for LG & FB• Allergen pamphlets, training and other resources from Dept of Health TAS, NAS, AAA, ASCIA, Allergen Bureau, AFGC, FSANZ & Allergen Collaboration• Targeted training and education, focusing on the risks associated with LM for Vulnerable populations
Questionnaire and assessment tools for pilot	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Checklist to guide regulators in the pilot - for LG• Small Business Maturity Matrix and Behaviour Change Guide - for LG• Follow-up visit questionnaire - for LG• Templates for recording outcomes of discussions - For LG

LG = local government, FB = food business