Powell, Jacob, Chapman (2011) Enhancing Food Safety Culture to Reduce Rates of Foodborne Illness

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The purpose of this article is to inform food producers, processors, distributors, retailers, food service outlets, and home meal producers of the importance of food safety. The authors (Powell, Jacob, and Chapman) stress that the key to reducing foodborne illness and improving food safety protocols is strengthening the food safety culture of these companies. Food safety culture is the way in which an organization or group approaches food safety, in thought and in behavior, and is a component of a larger organizational culture (Yiannas 2009). A strong food safety culture is integral in the comfort of consumers in a society that relies so heavily on the production and distribution of food by industrial farms and food processors. The consumers place a great deal of trust in these companies to prepare food safely to prevent outbreaks of foodborne illness. Still, getting the companies to comply with safe food-handling behaviors is a challenging task, as it requires more work and oversight to ensure these safer procedures are being carried out properly.

There are five factors that may cause foodborne illness:

1. Improper cooking procedures
2. Temperature abuse during storage
3. Lack of hygiene and sanitation by handlers
4. Cross-contamination between raw and ready-to-eat foods
5. Acquiring food from unsafe sources

(World Health Organization, 2006)

The purpose of enhancing food safety culture is to ensure that these harmful aspects of the food industry are a top priority for farmers, processors, and distributors so that outbreaks may be reduced. The article mentions three failures in food safety culture in which outbreaks occurred and resulted in many illnesses and deaths. In 2005, Wales experienced its largest E.coli outbreak because of cross-contamination of raw and cooked meat being packaged with the same machine. In Canada, personnel failed to properly clean the meat slicers which led to an outbreak of L. monocytogenes. In the United States, a peanut company was involved in a nationwide outbreak of Salmonella due to poor cleanliness, low quality peanuts, and botched FDA test results. All three outbreaks were caused by pure laziness and cheap bosses that didn’t feel like going the extra mile to ensure the safety of their consumers. It is horrifying to think that these people put profit and business before the well-being of the people for whom they have an enormous responsibility.

In order to decrease the occurrence of these episodes, the authors suggest that companies become more aware of food safety culture and its positive effect on the consumers and, therefore, business. Leaders, middle managers, and food handlers should be conscious of risks associated with food and keep themselves updated on food safety issues to encourage effective food safety systems before outbreaks occur. The key to a strong food safety culture is communication and encouragement from management in order to inspire motivation from workers to follow safe food handling procedures. Also, being open and transparent with consumers will increase trust in the company and keep them buying from honest businesses. Only the best in the food industry will take food safety culture into deep consideration and take the extra step to ensure the safety and wellness of their customers. Interesting choice. A bit more critical thought would have been welcome.