

I. Introduction

A. Background

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for setting standards for safe production of foods and advising state and local governments on food safety standards for institutional food service establishments, restaurants, retail food stores and other food establishments. Adoption of the FDA Food Code at the state, local and tribal level has been a keystone in the effort to promote greater uniformity.

North Carolina's "Rules Governing the Sanitation of Food Establishments," were initially adopted in 1976, and based on the 1976 "Food Service Sanitation Manual Including a Model Food Service Sanitation Ordinance." In 2009, Wake County conducted an assessment of North Carolina rules as compared to the 2005 FDA Food Code. At that time, North Carolina rules addressed 3 of the 11 key public health interventions and controls for risk factors that contribute to foodborne illness. In addition, the general retail practices of North Carolina rules were 46% compliant with the 2005 Food Code. Since that time, the State of North Carolina has proposed to adopt the 2009 Food Code by reference with subsequent amendments starting in 2012.

In addition to some gaps identified in the State rules, education and standardization of staff is the key to consistent and effective regulation. To address this issue and to prepare for the implementation of the Food Code, Wake County enrolled in the FDA Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards (Program Standards) in February 2008.

To gauge compliance with the 2009 Code, Wake County designed and conducted a baseline survey of risk factors associated with foodborne illness in the spring of 2010. The factors surveyed in Wake County's 2010 baseline survey included:

- Food from unsafe sources
- Inadequate cooking
- Improper holding temperatures
- Contaminated equipment
- Poor personal hygiene

Data for the 2010 baseline were obtained from 458 total inspections of institutional food service establishments, restaurants and retail food stores, consisting of 8,861 observations. This report presents the methodology used to establish a baseline and reports the results of the data. The report is provided to regulators and industry to focus greater attention on out-of-compliance risk factors.

B. Purpose

The purpose of the Wake County 2010 risk factor survey is to establish a baseline, so that industry and regulatory agencies have data on which to measure behavioral changes that directly relate to foodborne illness. In addition, the survey enables industry managers and the local jurisdictions to measure their programs against national criteria.

The 2010 Wake County Baseline Survey serves two purposes:

1. To identify risk factors most in need of priority attention and develop strategies to reduce their occurrence.
2. To evaluate trends over time and determine whether progress is being made toward reducing the occurrence of foodborne illness risk factors.

By establishing a baseline, the information gathered from future field inspections can be used to measure trends in terms of compliance with specific requirements of the current Food Code.

An important consideration for the 2010 Wake County baseline survey of risk factors is that the current State rules are not fully compliant with the 2009 FDA Food Code. As a result, certain risk factors can be expected to be out of compliance, since there is not routine regulatory attention to those factors. As the State of North Carolina moves toward adoption of the 2009 Food Code and subsequent amendments by reference, it can be expected that an improvement in compliance with the provisions of the Code that address these risk factors will have a direct impact on the occurrence of foodborne illness risk factors in future surveys.

During the 2010 Wake County Baseline Survey, staff evaluated 458 retail food establishments and made 8,861 observations for compliance with the 2009 Food Code. Based on the design and sample size, the Wake County 2010 survey results are valid for comparison with previous national surveys on the "Occurrence of Foodborne Illness Risk Factors."