



Compliance Assistance in Food Safety Inspections of Small-scale Food Processors in Michigan

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119th AFDO Annual Educational
Conference
Indianapolis, Ind.

June 20, 2015

The background of the slide is a photograph of a bakery. Shelves are filled with various types of bread, including round loaves and baguettes. The lighting is warm, and the bread appears freshly baked.

Overview

1. Research Problem
2. Method
3. Results
4. Conclusions
5. Questions and Discussion

A photograph of a bakery interior. In the foreground, there are several metal wire racks filled with various types of bread, including round loaves and baguettes. The breads are golden-brown and some have a dusting of flour. In the background, there are more shelves and racks, some containing more bread and others empty. The lighting is warm and the overall atmosphere is that of a professional bakery.

1. Research Problem

Research Problem

Background



- Encouraging small-scale processing

Research Problem

Background



- Encouraging small-scale processing
- Small businesses cite regulation as a barrier

Research Problem

Background



- Encouraging small-scale processing
- Small businesses cite regulation as a barrier
- What happens during inspections?

Research Problem

Research Questions



How do inspectors and small food processors interact?

- What are their experiences dealing with each other?
- Beneficial outcomes?
- Challenges?
- What training needs do they identify?

Research Problem

MDARD



- Approached MDARD with this research idea

Research Problem

MDARD



- Approached MDARD with this research idea
- The timing was right



2. Method

Method

Exploratory Study



- No existing research on food safety inspection practice in the US

Method

Exploratory Study



- No existing research on food safety inspection practice in the US
- Insufficient info to formulate a testable hypothesis

Method

Exploratory Study



- No existing research on food safety inspection practice in the US
- Insufficient info to formulate a testable hypothesis
- An exploratory study: Aims to identify issues and develop hypotheses for further research

Method

Qualitative Ethnography



Open-ended data collection that allows participants to respond in their own terms

- Semi-structured interviews
- Field observations

Method

Participant Selection



- Voluntary participation

Method

Participant Selection



- Voluntary participation
- Selection bias

Method

Participant Selection



- Voluntary participation
- Selection bias
- Exploratory study is intended for analytic, not statistical, generalization

Method

Inspector Participation



	#	%
Section		
Food	13	68%
Dairy	6	32%
Participation		
Field observations with interviews*	10	53%
Interviews only	9	47%
Gender		
Female	9	47%
Male	10	53%

* 12 field observations involved 10 inspectors: 1 inspector was accompanied to inspections of 3 facilities.

Method

Inspectors' Years of Experience



Years experience*	
Minimum	3
Maximum	26
Average	15
Median	18

* Values missing for 3 inspectors



3. Results

Results

- 1) Compliance Assistance
- 2) Soft Skills
- 3) Experience and Training

These are themes—they don't apply to every instance.

Results

Compliance Assistance



- a) Building Relationships
- b) Advising
- c) Being Flexible

Results

Compliance Assistance

Building Relationships



- Taking time to learn about how processors operated
- Spending time in conversation
- Inspectors enjoyed this, but there were also advantages to it.

Results

Compliance Assistance

Building Relationships



If you go in and you offend the people, you're not going to get cooperation.

You ask them a little bit about their family and how things are. You get that going, and it kind of lowers their defenses.

And I'm amazed at some of the things that people tell you...[I say] "You can't do that!" And sometimes they just don't know.

Results

Compliance Assistance



Advising

- MDARD encourages inspectors to assume an educational role.
- Small manufacturers can't afford specialized staff.
- They looked to inspectors for technical assistance and expertise.

Results

Compliance Assistance



Advising

What I like about the job is you get to work with people and you get to help them solve their problems.

We have two clients in this world: the public, and the [food business] entity. And they're not mutually exclusive.

Results

Compliance Assistance

Being Flexible



- Had expected that processors would want to see specific requirements changed.
- Instead, they described inspectors' flexibility.
- Relationships and trust were important.

Results

Compliance Assistance

Being Flexible



I'm focusing [at this time] on low-cost ways of improving quality.

If [the cheesemaker] were blowing me off and saying 'Fine me,' I'd be a different kind of inspector.

Results

Compliance Assistance



Recap:

- a) Building Relationships
- b) Advising
- c) Being Flexible

Results



1) Compliance Assistance

2) Soft Skills

3) Experience and Training

Results

Soft Skills



Important in compliance assistance
Appeared to improve compliance

Described and demonstrated skills like:

- a) Communication
- b) Patience
- c) Respect and Consideration
- d) Empathy

Results

Soft Skills



Communication

- Assumed responsibility for communicating clearly
- Not enough to simply state that something was a violation

Results

Soft Skills



Communication

I think for the most part, I have really good cooperation.

I try to explain why we mark it. “Here’s your list”—and I usually go through item by item, saying, “You’re using plastic containers, and they’re all breaking up.”

I probably won’t mark it if I don’t have a good reason or didn’t think it was an issue.

Results

Soft Skills



Communication

*You always have the enforcement stick.
Typically you can avoid that with good
communication skills and teaching skills and
getting them to willingly and voluntarily comply.
And appealing to their sense of pride in
ownership, their sense of pride in production and
quality.*

Results

Soft Skills



Respect and Consideration

- exercised authority
- but didn't throw their weight around

Results

Soft Skills



Respect and Consideration

When I go to cheese plants, I don't try to talk to the people actually doing the cheese too much, because I don't want them to lose track of where they're at—

"I forgot to add this" or "I left it at that temperature too long, now the temperature's too low."

I try not to do that.

Results

Soft Skills



Empathy

- Interest in the “whole business”
- Finding things in common
- There was instrumental value to this.

Results

Soft Skills



Empathy

If you don't take the time to turn yourself into a human being for them, then they see you as a bad parent.

Results

Soft Skills



Patience

This approach took a lot of time.

Lots of conversation

Going beyond the regulations themselves,
e.g., learning about markets

Results

Soft Skills



Patience

If you know the nature of his process, you understand things he does.

Walk in their shoes. You make yourself credible, and they'll do anything you ask.

Results

Soft Skills



Recap:

- a) Communication
- b) Patience
- c) Respect and Consideration
- d) Empathy

Results



- 1) Compliance Assistance
- 2) Soft Skills
- 3) Experience and Training

Results

Experience and Training



Life Experience

- Skills to diffuse tense situations, not take conflict personally, and balance “firm but not too firm, consistent discipline.”
- Parenting
- Teaching school

Results

Experience and Training



Life Experience

If you were to throw me in when I was 21, fresh out of [college], I would have failed. Absolutely would have failed at this job.

It was a black and white world. I have a lot more gray as a parent. I mean, I look at the bigger picture now, versus the short term goals.

Results

Experience and Training



Training

Such as:

- conflict resolution
- deescalating tense situations
- routine communication skills
- Myers-Briggs

A photograph of a bakery interior. In the foreground, there are two metal wire racks filled with various types of bread, including round loaves and baguettes. The background shows more shelves and racks, some with more bread and others empty, suggesting a large-scale production environment. The lighting is warm and even.

4. Conclusions

Conclusions

In Summary



- 1) Compliance assistance
building relationships, advising, being flexible
in enforcing regulations
- 2) Soft skills
communication, respect, consideration,
empathy, and patience
- 3) Life experience, and training

Conclusions

Hiring and Training



- Investment in soft skills training may improve compliance
- Broad range of experiences shape inspectors' abilities

Conclusions



Further Research

- Expand to broader representation of agencies and inspectors
- Correlate assistance with firm compliance
- Determine agency conditions that foster an assistive approach
- Add plant-level benefits to models for benefit-cost analysis of regulation

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Thank You

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Funding

- National Science Foundation
- USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program
 - W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Acknowledgements

- Research participants
- MDARD Food and Dairy Division

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Questions and Discussion