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

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Overview

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



Background



Encouraging small-scale processing

Background



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

Background



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

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?

MDARD

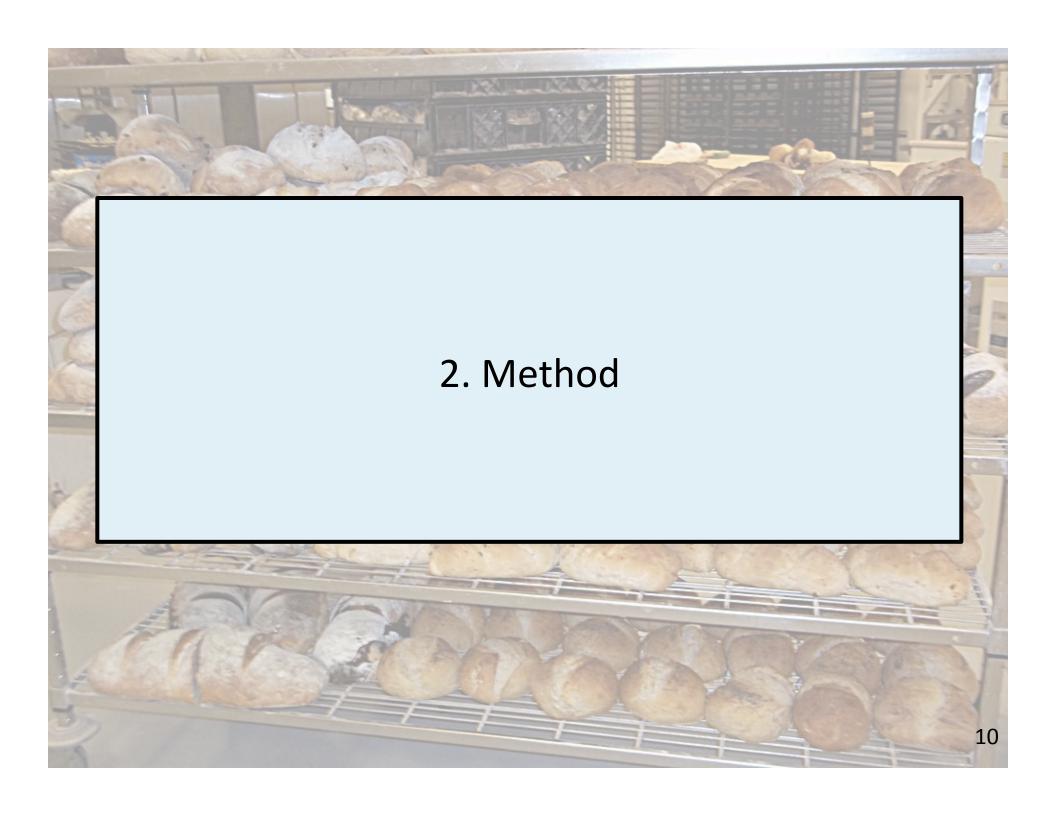


Approached MDARD with this research idea

MDARD



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



Exploratory Study



 No existing research on food safety inspection practice in the US

Exploratory Study



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

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

Qualitative Ethnography



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

- Semi-structured interviews
- Field observations

Participant Selection



Voluntary participation

Participant Selection



- Voluntary participation
- Selection bias

Participant Selection



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

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.

Inspectors' Years of Experience



Years experience*	
Minimum	3
Maximum	26
Average	15
Median	18

^{*} Values missing for 3 inspectors



Results 1) Compliance Assistance 2) Soft Skills 3) Experience and Training These are themes—they don't apply to every instance.

Compliance Assistance



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

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.

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 <u>that!</u>" And sometimes they just don't know.

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.

Compliance Assistance

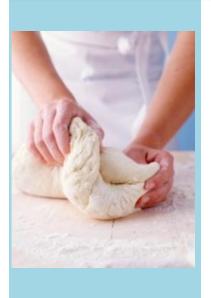


Advising

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.

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.

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.

Compliance Assistance



Recap:

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



1) Compliance Assistance

2) Soft Skills

3) Experience and Training

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

Soft Skills



Communication

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

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.

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.

Soft Skills



Respect and Consideration

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

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.

Soft Skills



Empathy

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

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.

Soft Skills



Patience

This approach took a lot of time.

Lots of conversation

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

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.

Soft Skills



Recap:

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



1) Compliance Assistance

2) Soft Skills

3) Experience and Training

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

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.

Experience and Training



Training

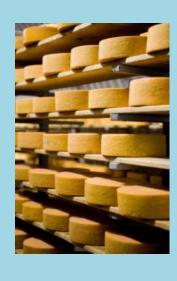
Such as:

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



Conclusions

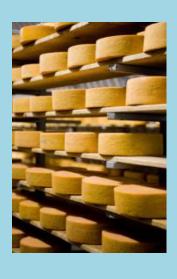
In Summary



- Compliance assistance building relationships, advising, being flexible in enforcing regulations
- 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



