

Conference for Food Protection Committee FINAL Report

COMMITTEE NAME: Inspection Form Scoring Committee

COUNCIL (I, II, or III): II

DATE OF REPORT: 12/15/2011

SUBMITTED BY: Bill Flynn, Margaret Binkley

COMMITTEE CHARGE(s):

The CFP recommends that a committee be formed and charged with the following:

- Conduct academic research to:
 - Investigate and determine the most effective Foodservice Establishment scoring system that is based on the current identified risk factors and interventions identified in the FDA Food Code for use with the current FDA Food Establishment Inspection Form.
 - Determine the most effective way to communicate the Food Establishment Inspection scores to the public so they have access to the information in advance of choosing where to dine and purchase food items.
- Work with academic researchers to identify funding sources to conduct their research and provide a letter of support for funding identified.
- Report the committee's finding back to the conference at the 2012 Biennial Meeting.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Initial interest in the 2010-2012 Inspection Form Scoring Committee was relatively high, with 30+ people volunteering to participate in the committee processes. An initial questionnaire was sent to all participants to gather answers to various assumptions developed from past Committees that related to the Charge. Comments were requested as well as other information that was felt the Committee should pursue. Initial questions/concerns formed by the Committee were:

- Is our objective as the Committee to reduce foodborne illness? Increase restaurant compliance? Or getting the word out to the public?
- Can the knowledge of scores allow for the public to make better decisions about restaurant selection or reduce food-borne illness? Or both?

Survey results included an over-whelming majority who agreed that a form that is intuitive to both the public and inspector is the most important charge of the committee.

There were six assumptions given where the Committee was asked to rate the need to address this assumption. These assumptions were:

- 1) "The health jurisdictions program includes inspector and industry training"-There was an overwhelming support of this assumption with 88% agreeing this was needed. Comments were: "Standardization is critical to the success of any inspection/grading

program” and “Standardization for health jurisdictions-the inspection staff must be trained on CDC risk factors so grades will be consistent, accurate, and meaningful.

2) “The scoring system is easy for the health inspector, the public and industry to understand”- there was a 100% support that this assumption was needed. Comments included: “There should be standardization of scoring/grading systems. Few of the systems are “apples to apples” so this is hard for industry and the general public to understand the differences” and “Must be risk-based and supported by science”.

3) “The inspector’s performance is standardized on an ongoing basis”-Again, 88% felt this was needed. Comments included “Standardization of the program and scoring would go a long way in standardizing an inspector’s performance”.

4) “The jurisdiction is using a risk-based food code that requires effective control of CDC risk factors”-Over 80% of the committee felt this was needed. Comments were “YES!” and “Systems that result in low scores because floors, walls, and ceilings aren’t clean don’t provide the best help to citizens looking for a safe place to dine”.

5) “The health department regularly evaluates their inspection program results using a consistent and effective methodology”-Here 75% felt that this assumption was somewhat needed. Comments included “Not unimportant, but not as critical once a good system is in place. It is more critical to ensure consistency among staff at that point”.

6) “The public receives the sanitation scores in a way that allows them to make informed decisions about where they would like to eat”-75% felt this was needed. Comments included “Public education on what a grade/score represents is an important component of a successful program” and “Message must emphasize and include that some minimum level/score of food establishment means it’s safe for consumers”.

It was felt that to be able to address the charge, it would be valuable to divide the group into three teams and assign specific duties to each. The teams decided on were:

1. Information Gatherers

- Gather form and scoring examples from local health department jurisdictions.
- Identify commonalities to keep the number of systems measured minimal.
- Obtain local jurisdictions/state surveys and gather information from the public to clarify the understanding of the system.

2. Practitioner

- Conduct health department-like, non-regulatory inspections using different forms to determine if it works for inspectors.
- Determine if inspectors find this easy to use in real life inspection scenarios.

3. Results Team

- Academia will take information; provide its meaningfulness and conclusions.
- Provide adequate scientific literature regarding public and inspector sentiment and understanding of current scoring methods.

Charge 1

Although information was gathered from 500 health inspection reports from 75 jurisdictions across the country, the data was not able to be analyzed prior to the processing of this report. If the committee is to continue, the data can be used for processing at that time. In the process of gathering the data, it was found that many health departments were against any type of scoring method. Some of the auditors that participated in the study asked to no longer participate because their departments don't believe in scoring. They believe the message of food safety and training is most impactful when scores are not involved.

A number of studies have been conducted relating to the posting of health inspection scores by a variety of methods and the public's perception of these scores. (See Supporting Attachment #1.)

Although there have been many studies completed on health inspection scores from various angles, there is still more research that could be conducted to answer the charge of this Committee. Some of the problems with present research is the fact that there are many different scoring methods used by city/county/state inspectors including: a percentage out of 100; a letter grade of A,B,C; pass/fail; or a color-coded sign posted in the window of a restaurant. Until some type of standardization can be developed to make comparisons between all of the scoring systems, no concise results can be reported. It has been found by the Committee that problems also lie in the fact that retail establishments (grocery stores) unlike restaurants tend to have many separate departments that receive multiple scores and can score poorly in some areas which would not represent the "true" score of the grocery store. It was also found that many health departments were against any type of scoring method. Other comments were:

1. Believe the inspection form speaks for itself. Grading systems of any kind are going to result in an over simplification of a complex set of data.
2. The best way to judge a location is review the full inspection report.
3. Grades in most areas turn into a self-enforcement tool, which is fine if this is what is wanted.

Charge 2

In 2010 our original researcher from Loma Linda University withdrew their committed resources due to a downturn in the economy. Subsequent interviews with potential researchers from University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Kansas State University, and North Carolina State University determined that the committee charge was broad enough that it would be advantageous for multiple researchers to work together.

The original goal of developing a grant application for the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – National Integrated Food Safety Initiative was abandoned due to researcher turnover in 2011. Instead of the grant the committee sourced volunteer research from Dr. Barbara Almanza from Purdue, Dr. Margaret Binkley from Ohio State University, and private industry consultants. The outcomes have been promising. (See Content Attachment #1.)

REQUESTED ACTION:

The Inspection Form Scoring Committee believes that the continuation of this Committee may not be to the benefit of the Conference for Food Protection.

The Inspection Form Scoring committee recommends the conference:

- Issue 1 – Acknowledge the work by members of the committees and thank the members for their time trying to meet the committee charge.
- Issue 2 – Disband the committee - the charge was determined to be too broad; there is no effective way to show that a Foodservice Establishment scoring system can assist the public in making an informed decision on where to eat without adequate funding.