

Feasibility of Restaurant Letter Grading in Utah

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Introduction

Utahns are in need of a transparent identification system to determine which restaurants are sanitary, based on the grade assigned by the health department, which would be conveyed to the public in a simplified format. This will create market pressure to improve safety and sanitation and to reduce the incidence of foodborne illness through informed consumer choice.

Overall, this proposal's main objective is to determine the feasibility of implementing a restaurant letter grading system in Utah. To achieve this objective, there are several sub-objectives:

- Survey the general public on their opinions and acceptance of the letter grading system
- Assess cost-effectiveness and success of other states' restaurant letter grading programs
- Discuss with health professionals the feasibility and limitations of our proposal
- Receive feedback from the Utah Restaurant Association and/or restaurant owners to determine the limitations of our proposal

Up to 70% of FBI is linked to food prepared at foodservice establishments (WHO, 2007). Determining the feasibility of this proposal is important to Public Health because implementing the letter grading system will potentially decrease the amount of foodborne illnesses and provide the public with information to help determine the health and safety of what they will be eating.



Sample Grade Card

Salt Lake County Health Department (SAMPLE)

On, (insert date here), (insert Restaurant/ facility name here/ address here)
EARNED THE FOLLOWING GRADE

A



Inspection Report Information



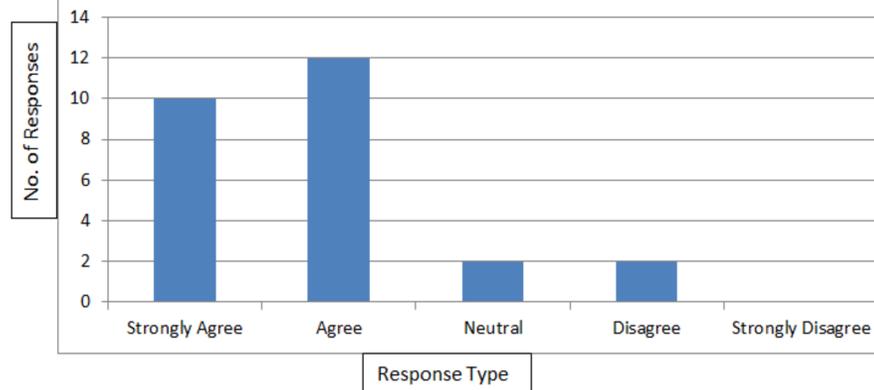
Inspection Report Information

If you have a question or concern, please contact the Environmental Health Division at xxx-xxx-xxxx or visit www.xxxxxxx.com

NOT TO BE REMOVED BY ANYONE OTHER THAN HEALTH AUTHORITY

Results

Consumers concerned about not having a letter-grading system for restaurant inspections in Utah



Materials and Methods

Environmental health professionals, restaurant owners, and the general public were interviewed/surveyed. First, environmental health scientists discussed the process used in their specific Utah counties for food inspections and how the current food inspection scores are determined. They also gave their opinion on our letter-grading proposal and they answered, with their experience, if they believe restaurant letter grading would be effective in Utah.

Next, twenty five restaurant-goers from the general public were surveyed to determine if they would benefit from the restaurant letter grades being easily displayed. A Likert Scale was used to assess the opinions and desires from the public. Finally, restaurant owners were interviewed to see what their main concerns are in regards to letter grading and to answer any questions that they had. In the end, political feasibility will be determined by speaking with a Utah State Legislator, LaVar Christensen, who is interested in sponsoring and passing a bill regarding restaurant letter grading in Utah.

The letter grading systems that other states utilize were closely examined. It was researched whether the other states' systems are beneficial to reducing the incidence of foodborne disease, as well as improve business for the restaurants. The letter grading system in other states allowed us to compare Utah's system to theirs, to see the limitations that they faced, if any, and how they overcame those limitations.

Conclusion

By surveying the public and researching foodborne illness in Utah, it was determined that the existing programs that are implemented in Utah are insufficient in protecting the public. The programs in place now provide limited access to the public for them to see the results of inspections and to understand the risks they are taking when dining out. This research supports that a letter grading system would aid in lowering the rates of restaurant contracted food borne illnesses. It would not just come from simply changing the format of the grade card, but with the accountability that comes with this awareness. The letter grade would make consumers more aware of inspection reports and more selective in their choices.

This selectivity would make restaurant cleanliness a part of a business plan. It would mean that restaurants are no longer only being held accountable by the health department, but also by consumers. If a restaurant knows that their potential customers would be put off by a poor grade, it would be crucial to the business's survival to make sure that they were up to code. This would by default lower food borne illness rates and is why Utah should be in support of a restaurant letter grading system.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere thanks to everyone who has been a contribution to developing our proposal: Environmental Health Professionals Brian Cowan, Royal Delegge, and Phil Bondurant for their opinions and expertise on health inspections and how to overcome the limitations to a letter grading system; Rose Henderson from the Southern Nevada Health Department for her knowledge and experience with a live letter grading system and grade cards; Ryan Glenn and Michelle Serrano for providing us with restaurant owners' perspectives; Representative LaVar Christensen for his guidance and interest in our plan for implementation; the participants from our survey for taking time out of their day; and last but definitely not least, Han Kim for his expertise and knowledge of public health research and policy projects and his continued support of our success.