Food Safety Culture
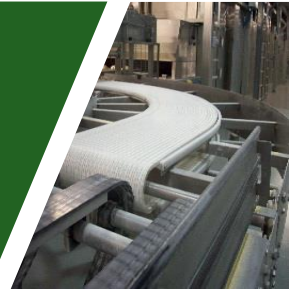
The success of implementing and maintaining a food safety program depends on having a positive food safety culture. An organization with a strong food safety culture demonstrates to its employees and customers that making safe food is an important commitment. Food safety must be treated as a way of doing business and not just something that is discussed at a weekly meeting.

What is Food Safety Culture?

Food safety culture is the values of an organization with regard to food safety. Food safety culture in a business is how everyone including owners, managers, employees, think and act in their daily job to make sure that the food they manufacture is safe. If you truly create a food safety culture, these thoughts and behaviors will be sustained over time as opposed to being the "program of the month" or this year's focus.

Why is Food Safety Culture Important?

An organization's culture will influence how individuals within the group think about food safety, their attitudes towards food safety, their willingness to openly discuss concerns and share differing opinions, and the emphasis that they place on food safety. A good food safety culture can protect:

- consumers from foodborne illness
- your brand's reputation
- your business from financial loss

How is Food Safety Culture Created?

Creating a food safety culture starts from making sure that the organization's values or beliefs are clear to everyone working in a food processing facility and that they can be shared with others. Core elements to create a successful food safety culture include:

- Strong Leadership –
  The strength of an organization's food safety culture is a reflection of its leadership. Leaders are necessary to identify food safety goals and provide focus to keep everyone on track to achieve success.
- Management Visibility –
  Management needs to 'walk the talk' and lead by example as employees look up to them as role models.
- Effective Communication –

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Information needs to be shared regularly. Management needs to communicate food safety expectations and employees need to be heard when voicing concerns or suggestions for improvement.

- Training –
  Keeping it simple and easy to understand for employees. Let them know what they need to do, why it is important and the role they play in it.
- Engagement –
  When following-up of any food safety issues, employee participation helps to motivate engagement as employee's feel they are contributing.
- Best Practices –
  Focus on meeting or exceeding industry's best food safety practices and not just meet minimum regulatory requirements.

Measuring Food Safety Culture

Measuring food safety culture helps understand if your organization's food safety performance is achieved or maintained at a certain established level. You can't manage what you didn't measure. Some useful examples to measure food safety culture include:

- observing and documenting behavior when following Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- assessment of internal and external audit results
- evaluate the frequency of customer complaints and analyse corrective actions taken
- regular assessment of employees' knowledge on food safety culture

Building and Implementing a Food Safety Culture

You can establish a food safety culture after implementing your food safety program in your facility. To establish a food safety culture, determine expected results and communicate them to your employees and management. This will create a sense of empowerment. Motivate staff to follow food safety practices and to become proactive so your food safety culture increases and maintains as a part of your food safety practices.

Communicate Expected Results → **Empower Employees** → **Implement and Document Food Safety Programs** → **Build and Measure Food Safety Culture**
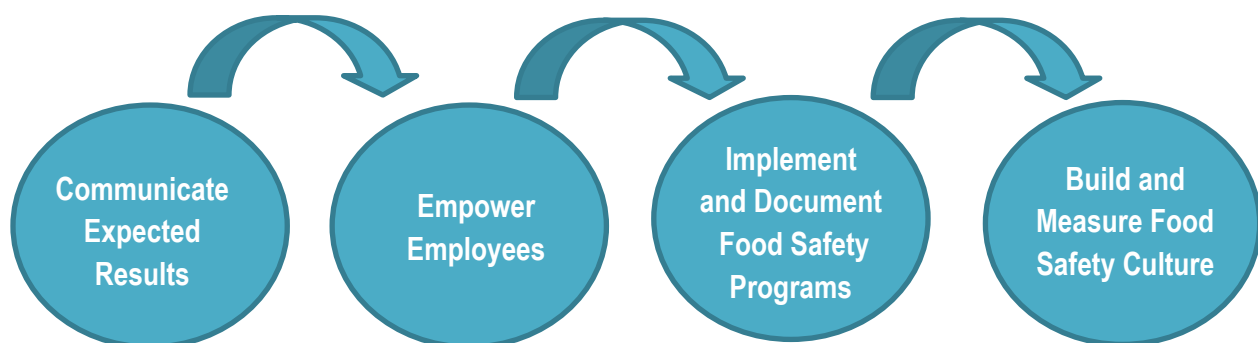
For more information on food safety please contact the Food Safety and Inspection Branch at foodsafety@gov.mb.ca or call 204-795-8418 in Winnipeg.