

Regulations Part of Life for Food Businesses

Businesses, large and small, are subject to a lot of regulations. The regulations come from all directions such as the Utah Labor Commission, OSHA, Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Agriculture, U.S. Food and Drug Administration and many more. These regulations can be burdensome and time consuming, but it is essential to be aware of the regulations and implement measures to be in compliance. The regulations have been established to protect the business, the employees and the public. Fines for non-compliance can be substantial, but the risk of causing injury or death is a far more compelling reason to assure compliance.

This month's focus on agriculture and food is a good opportunity to discuss some of the regulations that may apply to producers, processors and distributors of food products. The State of Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (<http://ag.utah.gov>) is a good place to start researching regulations that may apply. This

department has authority over a wide range of food production and distribution from the point the calf is on the ground or the seeds are planted through the processing, labeling and distribution.

These days, due to the scare of hoof and mouth and mad-cow disease, monitoring of livestock is very strict. As the livestock is moved from rangeland to feedlot to slaughter house, it needs to be tracked so that, should a health issue arise, it can be traced to the source.



Once the animals are sent to slaughter, the meat packers are thoroughly inspected. Generally an on-site inspector is in residence; however, some small processors such as jerky manufacturers and butcher shops may only be subject to occasional visits.

Crop production is not as regulated, although strict monitoring is still very important. Recall the e-

coli outbreak from the spinach grown in California. This incident resulted in 205 confirmed illnesses and three deaths. After extensive investigation, the potential environmental risk factors from the field involved were identified as; the presence of wild pigs, the proximity of irrigation wells and the surface waterways exposed to feces from cattle and wildlife. None of these things seem very easy to control to me, but Dole certainly paid a significant price for it.

Moving on to the processing phase, again, everything is subject to regulations. And the regulations are too numerous to include in this brief article. They cover facilities, equipment, water and waste, separation of food items, acidic/non-acidic canning, monitoring of temperature, bottled water, vending machines and on and on.

In the past, regulations prevented any food processing in a non-commercial kitchen. This pretty much ruled out any food production from the home kitchen. Recently

however, the Home (Cottage) Food Production operation program was passed. Now, limited food production can be done from the home so long as certain regulations are complied with such as: recipes must be submitted to the UDAF, ingredients must be stored separately from domestic food, no pets may be allowed to roam the home, products must bear labels, utensils and equipment must be washed and sanitized, and more. The types of allowable food production are qualified by the statement: “is not a potentially hazardous food or a food that requires time/temperature controls for safety.” This eliminates meat products and acidic food products such as salsa.

Labeling is required on the product before being offered for sale. Some of the labeling includes the name of the manufacturer, net quantity, ingredients list, and nutrition facts with some exemptions. Exemptions on the nutrition facts relate to volume of sales, food served in restaurants, bulk foods, raw fruits, vegetables and fishes and more.

Finally, we get down to distribution of the food products. Most of us are aware that restaurants must comply with Health Department inspections and the employees need food handlers permits. Bakeries and grocery stores are also subject to inspections.

It is hard these days to get and retain employees in the restaurant business. It is very important that the business enforce the licensing and hygiene regulations even though they may be desperate for help. I remember a very good restaurant



here in Ogden going under after salmonella poisoning ruined their reputation and recently I had several members of my family end up sick after dining at a very well known restaurant in the area. Food borne illnesses can be passed from one food type to others by hands, utensils, cutting boards, dirty wiping cloths and even contaminated water.

This only covers a hint of the regulations that agriculture and food are subject to. Other industries have different but equally important regulations to comply with. Make sure that your business knows about and complies with any regulations that apply. Remember, ignorance of the law is not a defense should problems arise.

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