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Article Title

Content analysis of consumer confidence in food service in relation to food safety laws, publicity, and sales

Citation

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Abstract

For many years, consumers have relied on food safety laws to protect them from foodborne illnesses. Unfortunately, incidents of foodborne illness have been increasing in recent years. As a result, consumer confidence in food safety has resulted in sales losses for many businesses as the media focuses more and more on finding someone to point the finger at in these incidences. This article will utilize previous studies of food safety laws, consumer confidence, and foodborne illness outbreaks to determine their respective effects on food sales.

Methods

Research was conducted by searching journal articles for terms related to: consumer confidence, food safety laws, food safety publicity, food safety controls, etc. Search results located 15 articles related to search criteria, and ranged from journals related to risk analysis, economics, and veterinary science. Each resulting study was analyzed for data relevant to the study at hand. Triangulation of data results was completed through news articles and information published on the internet.

Results

the affect of one source of negative media attention might be counteracted by two sources of positive attention, provided that the positive attention comes for an objective source. Ultimately, it is the attention that the media gives to an incidental outbreak that determines the resulting rise or fall of sales for an establishment. With each and every new media report of incidental outbreaks, government regulators have attempted to react after the incident occurs to try and regulate a solution so that the incident does not occur again. In theory, this would be a way of helping establishments handle related foodborne illness outbreaks; however, studies show that government regulations have very little impact on the reactions of consumers in relation to incidental outbreaks. In fact, “There are indications that people trust consumer organizations the most, and the food industry moderately, whereas government sources are generally not trusted at all” (Frewer et al. study as cited by Kuttschreuter, 2006, p. 1048). In this context, it is suggested that government regulations are either too late, or designed in a context to fix a problem that has not occurred yet. In addition, the position that consumers do not have confidence in the government to protect them is confirmed when it is established that

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) recently argued before Congress that: The new inspection tasks undertaken as part of the implementation of [HACCP] involve the mere review of company paperwork, rather than the direct inspection of production, equipment or facilities . . . While HACCP could be used to augment food safety, USDA is using it as a back door to deregulate.

Conclusion

Restaurant sales have several variables that attribute to its fluctuations, with consumer confidence being one major variable that must be dealt with. In the area of food service sanitation, the implication of an incidental outbreak can be devastating for the entire supply chain of a product, no matter where along the chain the outbreak occurred. Laws and regulations also play a role in understanding the relation of food safeties affect on sales. In January 1994, the 1993 version of the FDA Food Code was announced and became readily available by March 1994. The E. coli outbreak from Jack-in-the-Box occurred in early January of 1993, and would appear to be a catalyst for the design of the FDA food code; however, The FDA had begun to work on revising the food safety laws as early as 1990 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1995, p. 87), with the objective to take three sanitation codes, known previously as the FDA Unicode from 1976, and combine them into one comprehensive food code that included information on implementing HACCP objectives (National Restaurant Association, 2007). Even though HACCP was originally introduced in the 1960s, and the FDA began including it in the 1993 Food Code, it was found that, "by 1997, between 75–81% of U.S. food processors had implemented, partially implemented, or were planning to implement HACCP" (C. E. Morris as cited by Lyon, 1998, p. 770). Ultimately, the increase or decrease in sales for food service establishments can be directly related to incidence of foodborne illness reported by the media and the resulting laws and regulations that government introduces. In fact, it can be shown that consumers have an actual systematic method for determining whether or not a potential risk should be avoided or not.