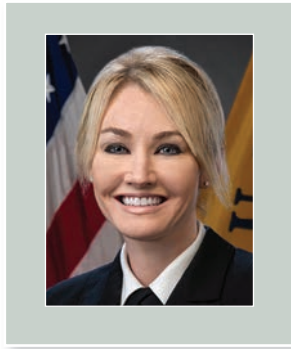


► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



CDR Anna Khan,
MA, REHS/RS

Behind Every Safe Bite: The Stewards of Food Safety

As I sit at my favorite corner table in Kimball House (a Decatur, Georgia, restaurant renowned nationally for its stellar oyster program) savoring the briny perfection of freshly shucked oysters, I am reminded of the intricate web of safety measures that allow me—and countless others—to indulge in such culinary delights without worry. But even in moments of leisure such as enjoying a favorite meal, I cannot help but reflect on the unseen efforts of food inspectors and the vital role they play in protecting public health.

Food safety is not just a regulatory requirement—it is a fundamental public health priority. Every meal we consume passes through a complex supply chain involving farmers, processors, distributors, and restaurants before it reaches our plates. A single lapse in food safety along this chain can have serious consequences, ranging from mild foodborne illness to outbreaks that impact entire communities. In a world where global food systems are increasingly interconnected, the role of food inspectors has never been more crucial.

Food inspectors are champions of environmental public health. They operate behind the scenes, ensuring that food establishments comply with safety standards to prevent contamination and the spread of foodborne illnesses. Their work is meticulous and requires a deep understanding of microbiology, food-handling procedures, and sanitation practices. Every inspection they conduct helps safeguard the health of millions of people, preventing outbreaks that could otherwise strain healthcare systems and disrupt communities.

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One of the most significant threats to food safety is foodborne illness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 48 million people in the U.S. suffer from foodborne illnesses each year, with 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. These numbers underscore the necessity of food safety regulations and enforcement. Food inspectors play a crucial role in mitigating these risks by identifying potential hazards, enforcing proper food handling protocols, and educating food service workers about best practices.

A strong partnership between food inspectors and restaurants is essential to maintaining high food safety standards and protecting public health. The role of food inspectors extends beyond routine inspections. They are educators, advisors, and enforcers of food safety regulations. Many work closely with restaurant owners and food handlers to ensure they understand and implement proper food safety measures. This collaborative approach helps create a culture of food safety, where busi-

nesses are not just compliant but also genuinely invested in serving safe meals to their patrons. By fostering mutual trust and cooperation, food inspectors and restaurants can work together to uphold the highest standards of food safety and ensure the well-being of the community.

Moreover, food inspectors help manage emerging challenges in food safety. As new food trends such as farm-to-table dining and raw food consumption gain popularity, inspectors must adapt their knowledge and inspection techniques to address new risks. Changes in the climate can also play a role in food safety. Temperature changes and extreme weather events can increase the prevalence of foodborne pathogens. Inspectors must stay ahead of these evolving threats through continuous education and training, ensuring that their expertise remains relevant in an ever-changing landscape.

Technology is also transforming food safety and the work of food inspectors. Digital tracking systems, artificial intelligence, and data analytics are being increasingly used to monitor food safety compliance and detect potential outbreaks before they escalate. Food inspectors are now leveraging these tools to enhance their ability to track foodborne illnesses, identify sources of contamination, and improve overall food safety strategies.

Despite their indispensable role, food inspectors often work under challenging conditions. They must manage heavy workloads with limited resources and confront evolving food safety threats head-on. Their work requires resilience, meticulous atten-

tion to detail, and an unwavering commitment to public health. They are advocates for consumer safety, often putting themselves in difficult positions to ensure that food establishments prioritize health and hygiene over profit.

As I finish my meal and reflect on the dedicated professionals who make these types of meals possible, I feel immense gratitude for the work of food inspectors. Their vigilance

allows us to enjoy our favorite dishes with confidence, knowing that every step has been taken to protect our health.

The next time you dine out, take a moment to appreciate the unseen efforts of food safety professionals. Their work ensures that the food we eat is not just delicious but safe. And if you ever have the pleasure of enjoying a plate of oysters at Kimball House, remember the countless hands—seen and unseen—that

made that experience possible. Food safety is a collective responsibility, and food inspectors are its steadfast guardians. ✨



akhan@neha.org

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