



FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION

# ENHANCING YOUR FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

A FRAMEWORK FOR CONTINUAL  
IMPROVEMENT AND STANDARDIZATION

BY JESSY SADLER, SNS

**FOOD IS ESSENTIAL FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL** and overall well-being. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 600 million people around the world become sick and approximately 420,000 deaths occur after eating contaminated food each year. In today's world, establishing and maintaining a food safety program is not enough. A food safety management system is more than just a set of policies, procedures, and processes. It is a culture of continual improvement and a commitment to putting food safety first.

The decisions that people make at each level of the food chain—from farmers to foodservice establishments—are influenced by the culture of their organization. Positive cultures encourage people to make good decisions about food safety, while negative cultures can lead to poor decisions and unsafe practices. The primary goal of this article is to outline the dimensions and critical content of food safety within the context of an organizational culture.

## FOOD SAFETY FRAMEWORK FOR PROCESSES

A framework for processes is a structured system consisting of policies, procedures, and practices that organizations must follow to ensure consistency and standardization. A well-designed food safety framework helps organizations identify and mitigate potential risks which can help prevent foodborne illnesses, protect public health, and ensure food safety standards. Some key components of a food safety framework for processes would include:

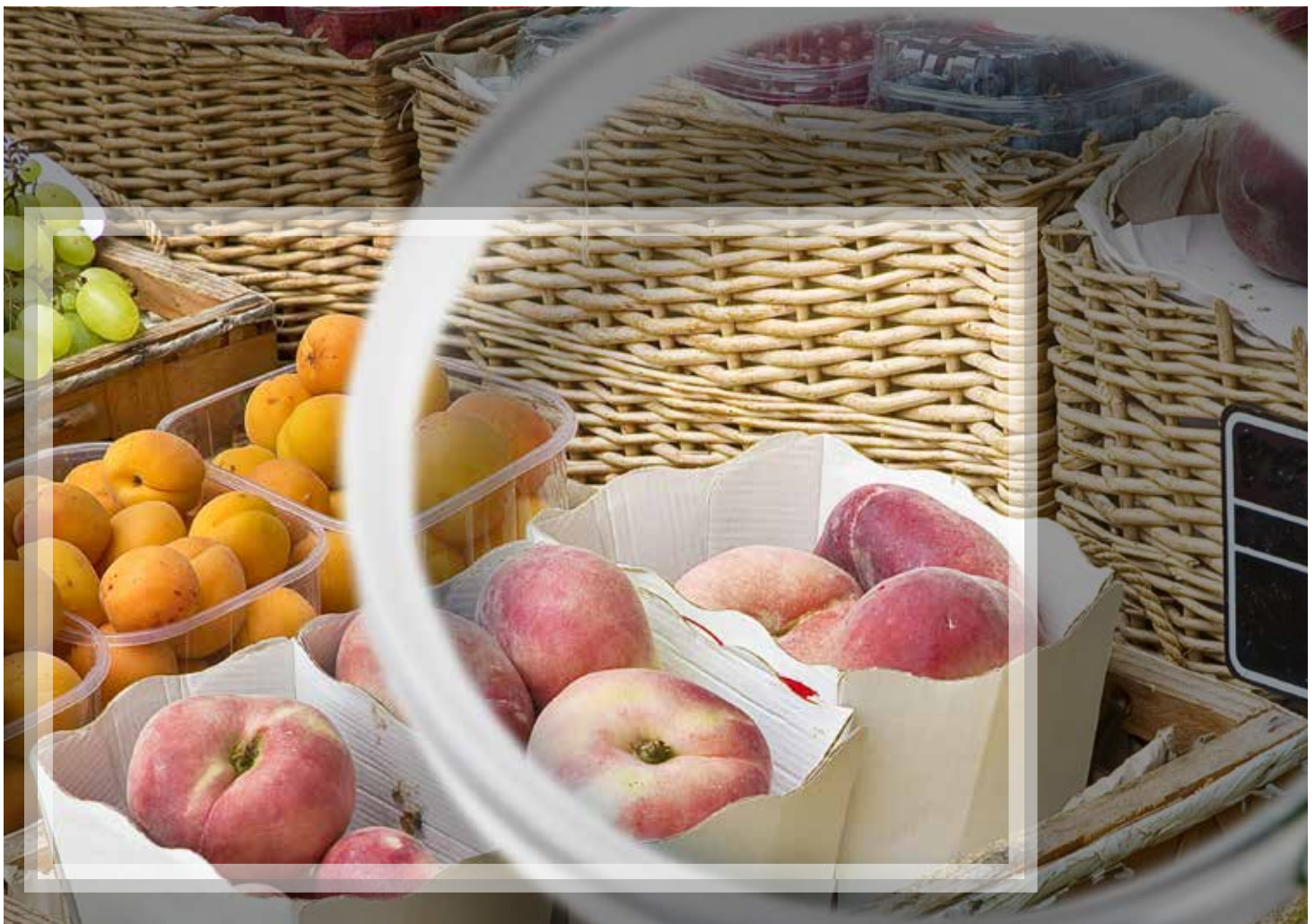
- **Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP):**  
A systematic approach to identifying, evaluating, and controlling food safety hazards.

- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** Written instructions that describe how to perform specific tasks in a consistent and safe manner.
- **Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs):** A set of regulations that establish the minimum requirements for food safety and sanitation in food processing facilities.
- **Quality Control (QC) and Quality Assurance (QA):** QC activities ensure that food products meet quality and safety standards, while QA activities ensure that the QC system is effective.
- **Traceability and Recall Procedures:** Systems in place to track food products and to recall products if necessary.

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) is a private organization that has developed a set of food safety standards that are recognized around the world. GFSI defines food safety culture as “the shared values, beliefs, and norms that affect mind-set and behavior toward food safety in, across, and throughout an organization.” This means that the food safety culture is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach, but rather it needs to be defined to be adapted to the specific needs and expectations of each organization.

## INTEGRATING FOOD SAFETY PROCESS FRAMEWORK ACROSS YOUR DEPARTMENT

Combining food safety principles with a process framework can be a powerful way to help organizations see food safety as a top priority and a fundamental part of their operations. This can create a culture of continuous improvement and ensure compliance.



## Process Improvement

*How do you anticipate, manage, and respond to change, learn from the past, and prepare for the future?* Process improvement within a kitchen setting means streamlining every aspect of food preparation, cooking, and service processes. This can be done by improving efficiencies in the workflow, from sourcing ingredients to plating dishes. This could involve reorganizing the kitchen layout, refining cooking techniques, or even adjusting the timing of food delivery. By evaluating and refining these processes, kitchens can reduce waste, minimize wait times, and ensure a consistently high standard of food quality.

*Kaizen*—a compound of two words that together translate to “good change”—is a Japanese philosophy that emphasizes continuous improvement. It is the way of focusing on making small, incremental changes to improve processes, products, or services over

# 改善

KAIZEN

—a compound of two words that together translate to “good change”—is a Japanese philosophy that emphasizes continuous improvement.

a period of time. For example, a restaurant employee might identify a way to be efficient by reorganizing the kitchen layout so that ingredients are more easily accessible.

Some key principles of Kaizen include:

- **Continuous improvement:** Emphasizing that improvement is an ongoing, never-ending process. It encourages organizations to constantly look for ways to make things better.
- **Teamwork:** Promoting collaboration among employees at all levels. It believes that the employees’ knowledge, experience, and skills are a valuable resource for generating improvement ideas.
- **Standardization:** Advocating for standardizing processes once improvements are identified. This ensures that the new and better way of doing things becomes the new standard.

## Customer Focus

*Are you listening to what your customers are saying? How does your listening method vary between customer groups?* Customers vary per industry. For example, customers in a restaurant are paying consumers, while customers in a healthcare facility can be the patients, their families, and staff. Kitchens can gather valuable insight by using feedback mechanisms and customer satisfaction surveys. Surveys are a crucial tool for continuous process improvement. They can help shed light on exactly how each process impacts the entire company— from customer satisfaction to employee satisfaction.

Here are some specific ways that surveys can be used to improve kitchens:

- Employee surveys can identify areas where employees feel like processes can be improved. This could include things like the tools and equipment that are available, or the way that tasks are assigned.
- Vendor surveys can help you to identify areas where your suppliers can improve their products or services. Effective supplier management involves regular evaluations, clear communication, and following strict quality and safety standards for timeliness of their delivery and communication for all ingredients and products sourced.
- Customer surveys can help you understand what your customers value most and where they see opportunities for improvement. This could include things like the quality of the food, the speed of service, or the overall dining experience.

## Employee Engagement

*How do you assess your workforce's engagement through performance measures and goals? How do you foster a work environment with high performers?* Employee satisfaction can lead to a positive work environment which, in turn, reduces turnover rates and creates a more motivated kitchen staff. For example, providing ongoing training, recognizing and rewarding outstanding performance, and offering opportunities for professional growth can all help create a highly engaged kitchen team.

Feedback and feedforward are two different ways of providing communication to employees and improving kitchen operations. Feedback is the process of providing information to someone about their past performance; whether positive or negative, it is always intended to help the person improve. Feedforward, on the other hand, is the process of providing information to someone about their future performance. It is focused on helping the person achieve their goals. When providing feedback and feedforward, it is important to be specific, timely, and constructive. For example, a chef might compliment a cook on grilling the steaks to perfection, but also suggest using a food thermometer next time to ensure that the steaks are cooked to the correct temperature.

## Leadership

*What is your company vision and mission, and how is it clearly expressed so that both are understood by all staff? What does your department's strategic plan look like? Does it align with the organization's strategic plan?* Effective leadership is essential for a successful department. Strong, ethical leadership ensures that the kitchen

runs smoothly and meets high standards consistently. Organizational leadership sets the tone and direction for the department and organization by having a clear vision and providing the resources needed to achieve it. Leaders must also be visible and committed to food safety and must hold their team accountable.

Kaizen practitioners are encouraged to go to the workplace to observe processes firsthand using Gemba. *Gemba*—a Japanese word that translates to “the actual place”—is an important concept in the food industry because it allows managers and workers to identify areas for improvement in the food preparation process, food safety practices, and customer experience firsthand while visually reviewing their documented processes through operations. This can help identify bottleneck issues, and make adjustments to improve efficiency and flow.

**KITCHENS CAN GATHER  
VALUABLE INSIGHT**  
by using feedback mechanisms  
and customer satisfaction  
surveys—they can help shed  
light on exactly how each process  
impacts the entire company.





BY FOCUSING ON RESULTS and using data to make decisions, kitchens can monitor and improve their food safety practices.

### Data-Driven Decision-Making

*How do you contribute to food safety in your organization? When was your last food safety training and what did you learn?* Food safety is of paramount importance in a kitchen. By focusing on results and using data to make decisions, kitchens can monitor and improve their food safety practices. Kitchens need to create clear and written Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for food handling, sanitation, and hygiene. For example, it is important to regularly check temperature records for perishable ingredients, maintain proper food inventory using FIFO (first in, first out), and analyze customer feedback. Another example is the use of a food inventory software, which can track the movement of food through the kitchen and identify areas where food is at risk of cross-contamination.

### Continuous Improvement

*How is continually improving a process increasing efficiency and results? What is your cycle of learning to assess and improve standards?* Kitchens can greatly benefit from a commitment to continuous improvement. Regular assessments, audits, and feedback help identify areas for improvement in food safety practices, menu offerings, or kitchen processes. Whether it's refining food safety practices or streamlining kitchen processes, a culture of continuous improvement should be an ongoing challenge to ensure that the kitchen remains compliant and responsive to evolving customer needs and industry trends.

### WRAPPING IT UP

In summary, food safety culture is a continuous process that requires everyone in the organization to work together

to achieve a shared goal. Establishing a framework can be highly beneficial in a foodservice operation by providing a structured approach to improving performance, enhancing food safety, and achieving operational excellence. Whether you are developing an overall performance map, looking at results, or even identifying inefficiencies, a food safety and operational framework ensures that kitchens consistently deliver safe, high-quality food and exceptional service. So, what will *your* next step be regarding continual improvement and operational excellence? **E**



### REFERENCES

Scan QR code to view the list of resources for this article.



**JESSY SADLER, SNS** | ✉ [sadler.jessy@gmail.com](mailto:sadler.jessy@gmail.com)

Jessy Sadler has worked in school food service for eight years and is currently the Nutrition Director in Urbandale, Iowa. She holds a School Nutrition Specialist (SNS) credential with a Master's Degree in Nutrition Science from Eastern Michigan University and a B.S. in Nutrition and Dietetics with a minor in Wellness from Bradley University. Sadler is a certified ServSafe Instructor and Proctor, and provides food safety training to many professional groups such as schools, restaurants, and healthcare facilities.

## CE QUESTIONS | FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION



This **Level I FOODSERVICE** article assumes that the reader has introductory knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a basic understanding and explanation of the concepts of the subject matter and recalling of related facts.

**CBDM** ●●●  
continuing competence  
where education advances performance

Reading *Enhancing Your Food Safety Culture: A Framework for Continual Improvement and Standardization* and successfully completing these questions online in the ANFP Marketplace has been approved for 1 hour of Sanitation continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. To earn 1 SAN CE hour, visit [www.ANFPonline.org/market](http://www.ANFPonline.org/market) and select **Edge CE Articles** within the Publications section. Purchase the article and complete the quiz.

1. How can data-driven decision-making contribute to food safety?
  - A. By monitoring temperature records for perishable ingredients
  - B. By creating clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
  - C. By eliminating customer feedback
2. The key benefit of a commitment to continuous improvement in kitchens is to:
  - A. Reduce the need for food safety policies
  - B. Adapt to evolving customer needs and industry trends
  - C. Increase the use of food inventory software
3. The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) defines “food safety culture” as:
  - A. A set of policies and procedures
  - B. Shared values, beliefs, and norms related to food safety
  - C. A one-size-fits-all approach to food safety
4. What is Kaizen’s approach to improvement?
  - A. Continuous, incremental improvements
  - B. Large, radical changes
  - C. Immediate, one-time fixes
5. Which component is *not* mentioned as part of a food safety framework for processes?
  - A. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP)
  - B. Customer surveys
  - C. Quality Control (QC) and Quality Assurance (QA)
6. Leadership is important for a successful food safety culture in order to:
  - A. Set high food safety standards
  - B. Provide resources for continuous improvement
  - C. Both A and B
7. What is the role of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) in a food safety framework?
  - A. Setting quality control standards
  - B. Identifying, evaluating, and controlling food safety hazards
  - C. Streamlining kitchen processes



### MAKE YOUR CE HOURS AUDIT PROOF

**ATTENTION CDM, CFPPs!** Purchase your online CE products in the ANFP Marketplace and your completed CE hours will be automatically reported in your continuing education record. This includes all ANFP online courses, archived webinars, and online CE articles.