**BASIC FOOD SAFETY AND HOW TO INSTILL IT IN THE COMPANY CULTURE**

An issue related to food safety – or lack thereof – is every operator’s worst nightmare. It seems every few months we read about a new (or renewed) food safety issue at one major chain or another. tThe The cost for a restaurant that experiences a foodborne illness outbreak can run up to 101 percent of their annual revenue. This, and the general desire to keep patrons safe, makes preventing illness the foremost goal of any chef and organization.

**Washing hands**: This is the most effective practice for eliminating the spread of bacteria. While the sight of gloves may create a sense of safety, nothing is more effective than hand washing.

**Correct use of gloves*:*** Just because the gloves are on does not make it a free-for-all in the kitchen. There are still rules to abide by, such as changing your gloves every time you touch a new order. When it comes to ready-to-eat food — which cannot be touched with bare hands — be sure your staff is following proper glove protocol and changing them as often as necessary.

**Proper storage:** An audit of any storage equipment should reveal that items with the most potential for carrying bacteria and pathogens are stored at the bottom. Items with the least potential should be stored at the top. If your chicken is above anything, gather the troops — it’s time for a staff food safety meeting.

**Accountable purchasing**: If, as an operator, you don’t have the time or resources to ensure the quality and safety of the food you’re purchasing, the best way to cover your bases is to make your purchases through a reputable company, such as one of the many qualified broadlines.

**Washing produce:** Despite coming from a reputable source, produce still needs to be washed. It’s a simple task that can help operators avoid major headaches.

**Clean and sanitize work areas/equipment:** Prioritizing this activity can help ensure the necessary cleaning tasks are accomplished. Though it may seem extremely rudimentary, proper cleaning tasks can easily fall by the way-side if they are not regularly scheduled.

While it is typical for operators to have a strong understanding of these best practices, the difficulties seem to arise in the next steps — adopting them into the culture of the business to the point where the staff can police itself.

• Develop practices that constantly promote food safety. For example, post signage of proper storage and sanitation requirements around the kitchen in easily visible or often visited locations.

• Appoint or hire managers that can lead by example. For instance, front-of-house managers should follow proper hand washing protocol every time they visit the kitchen.

• Get ServSafe certified and have a manager that is certified for every shift.

• Perform safety audits on a regular, but unpredictable, schedule. For best results, run these daily.

• If you’re opening a new restaurant, go through the local health department to file the appropriate paperwork and understand every requirement with them immediately, even before you’ve opened. Submit your operational plans and figure out how you should be initiating anything that requires an element of food safety. Don’t wait for the health department to come to you.