



Food Safety Culture for All: Building Public Health Accountability in Food Safety Agencies

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MCAFDO Virtual AEC, December 4, 2025

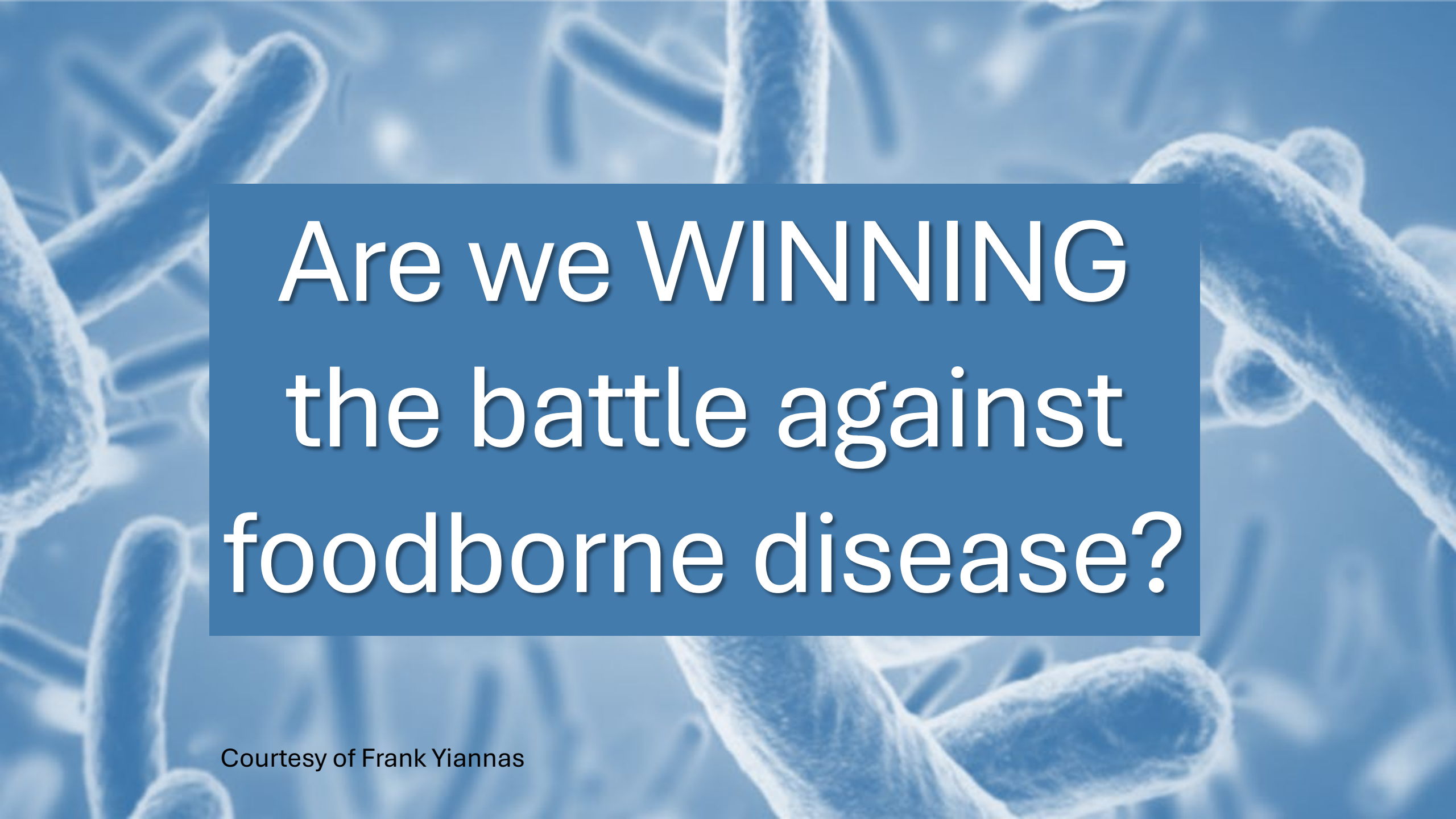
Retail Food Safety Regulatory Association Collaborative Cooperative Agreement



Retail Food Data Analytics is one of the key projects for meeting the Collaborative's CAP objectives.

This project was supported by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award U18FD007051 with 100 percent funded by FDA/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by FDA/HHS, or the U.S. Government.



The background of the slide is a blue-tinted microscopic image showing numerous rod-shaped bacteria, likely E. coli, scattered across the frame. Some bacteria are in sharp focus, while others are blurred in the background.

Are we **WINNING**
the battle against
foodborne disease?

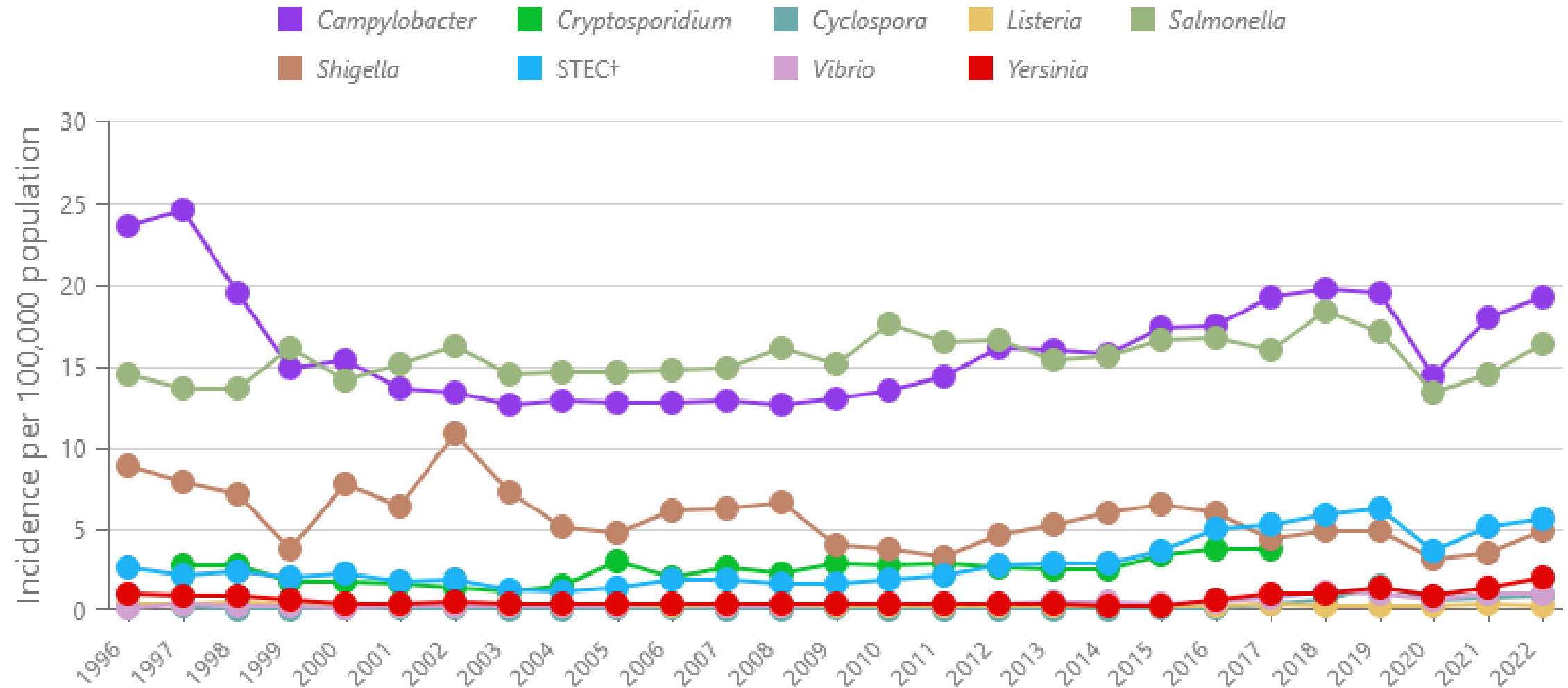
Courtesy of Frank Yiannas

Infections by year; 1996-2022

Incidence per 100,000 population – FoodNet sites; all test methods

† Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli*

Source: FoodNet, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Considerable Reliance of Small Businesses on Regulatory Agencies and Food Inspectors



Generated with ChatGPT

80%

Cited health department **inspections as a key tool** for ensuring food safety

85%

Reported seeking **improvement ideas** from their inspectors

71%

Use food safety **signs and training materials** from their health department

61%

Rely on inspectors to help shape their food safety procedures



Session Objectives

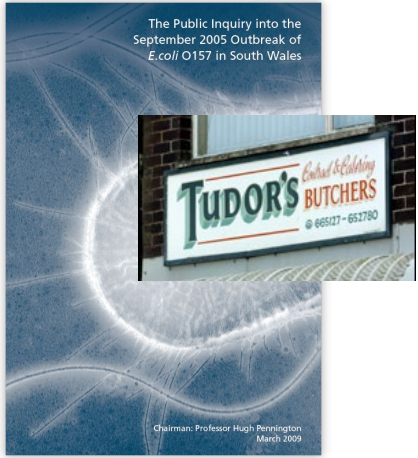
- 1) **Understand:** Explain the core principles of food safety culture and their relevance to regulatory agencies.
- 2) **Analyze:** Assess your agency's current food safety culture by identifying strengths and areas for improvement.
- 3) **Apply:** Develop actionable strategies to integrate food safety culture principles into daily regulatory practices.
- 4) **Evaluate:** Critique existing food safety culture initiatives within your agency and propose enhancements to align with best practices.

What is a Food Safety Culture?

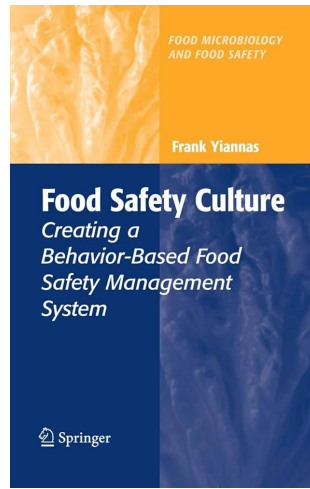


Culture is **shared patterns** of **thought** and **behavior** that characterize a social group, which are learned through socialization processes and **persist** through time.

- Social & Behavioral Foundations of Public Health
Courtesy of Frank Yiannas



2005



2009



AU & NZ Pilot food
safety culture &
maturity models

2018



Food safety culture
required across all
food businesses

2021/22

2008



2011



1st Food Safety
Culture Conference

2020



Food safety culture
a core element of
FDA's Smarter Era
of Food Safety



2005 *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak in Wales linked to a local butcher shop.

- 157 cases of illness
- 31 hospitalized
- One child, Mason Jones (5 y/o), died

“The **food safety culture** for a business serving high-risk food was completely inadequate and would not have controlled the risk of cross-contamination.”

- Prof. Chris Griffith
2009 Pennington Report

“The idea of a ‘**food safety culture**’ is that every person in the organization should understand their role in producing safe food, and the challenge is in the communication of that message.

- Dr. Randy Huffman, Maple Leaf Foods
2009 Weatherill Report



2008 Listeriosis outbreak in Canada linked to meat products.

- 191 meat products recalled
- 57 cases of illness
- 22 deaths



In a strong, positive
food safety culture,
everyone does the right
thing for food safety
even when no one is
watching

Food Safety Culture

=

Public Health Culture

Food Safety = Behavior

What's food safety culture got to do with me?





Food Safety Culture is Relevant to Regulators

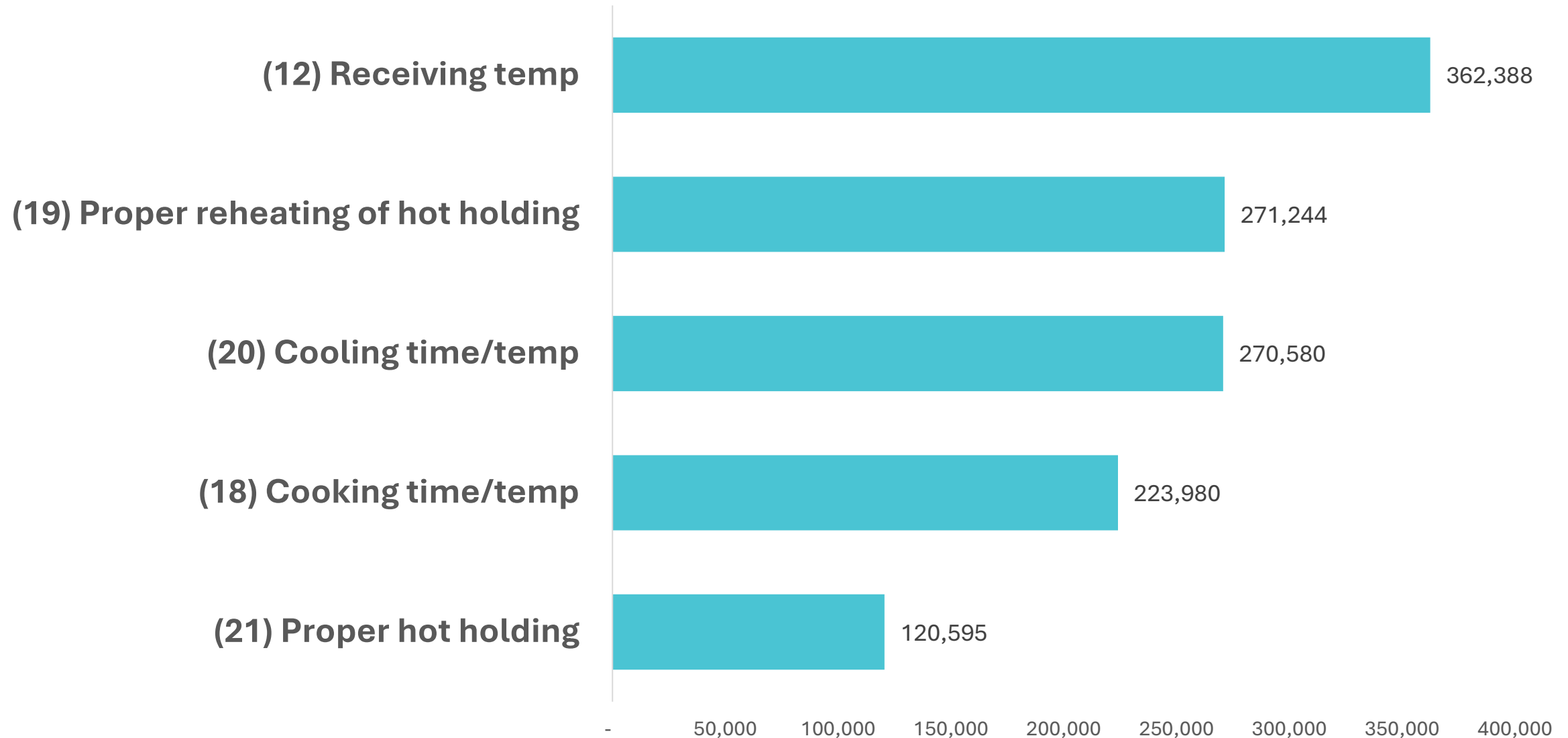
What You Might Be Thinking	Why This Matters for Regulators, Too
This is just for industry.	We help shape the culture we regulate. Where inspectors focus their inspections influences where operators focus their attention.
We inspect food, not feelings.	We already assess behavior and accountability. FSC makes it more intentional and strategic.
We already do inspections, why add more?	Behavior influences compliance.
Culture isn't measurable.	Culture is measurable—just not by a single number.

Are we
focused
on the
right
things?



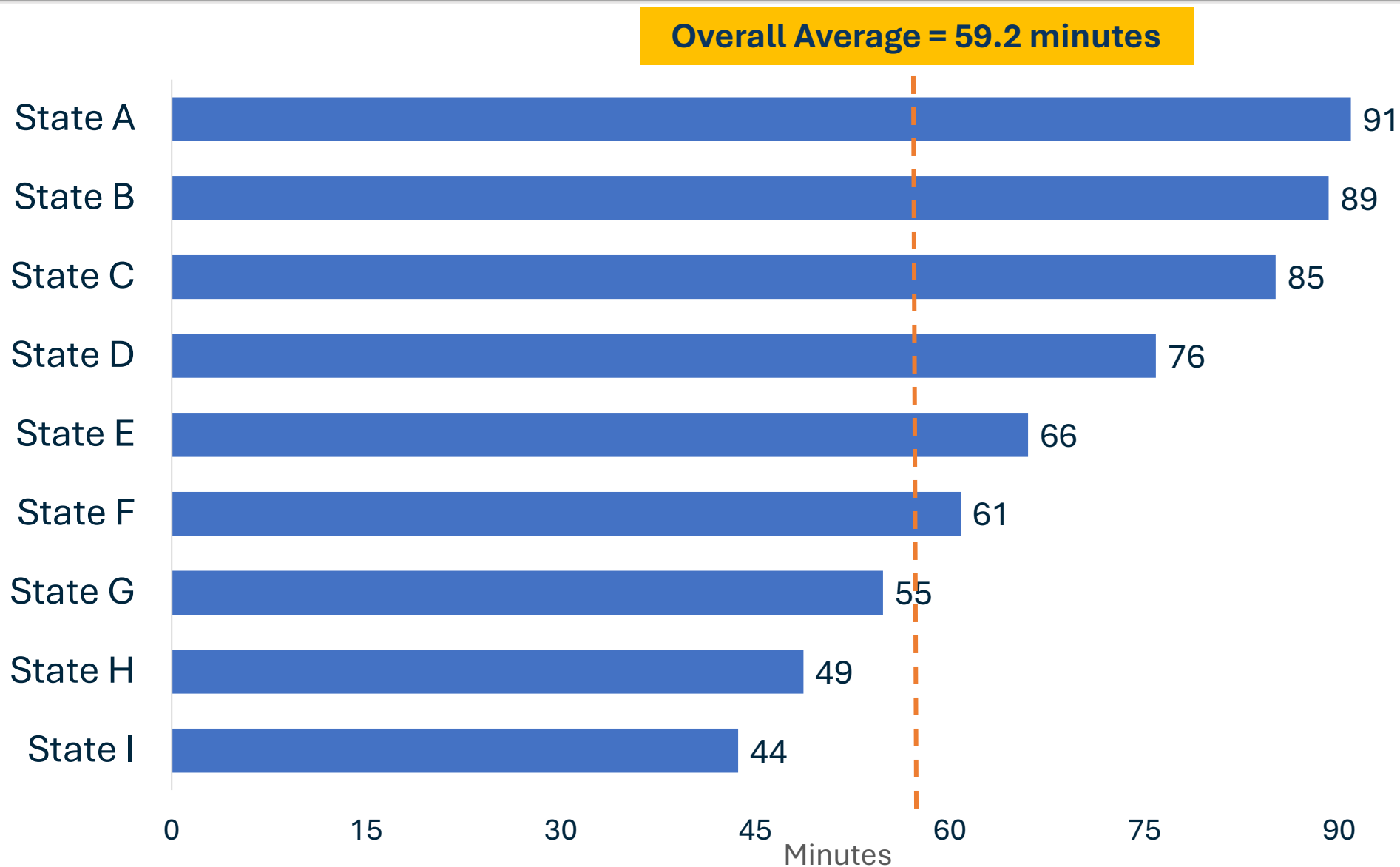
Top Risk Factors NOT OBSERVED

(n = 436,125)

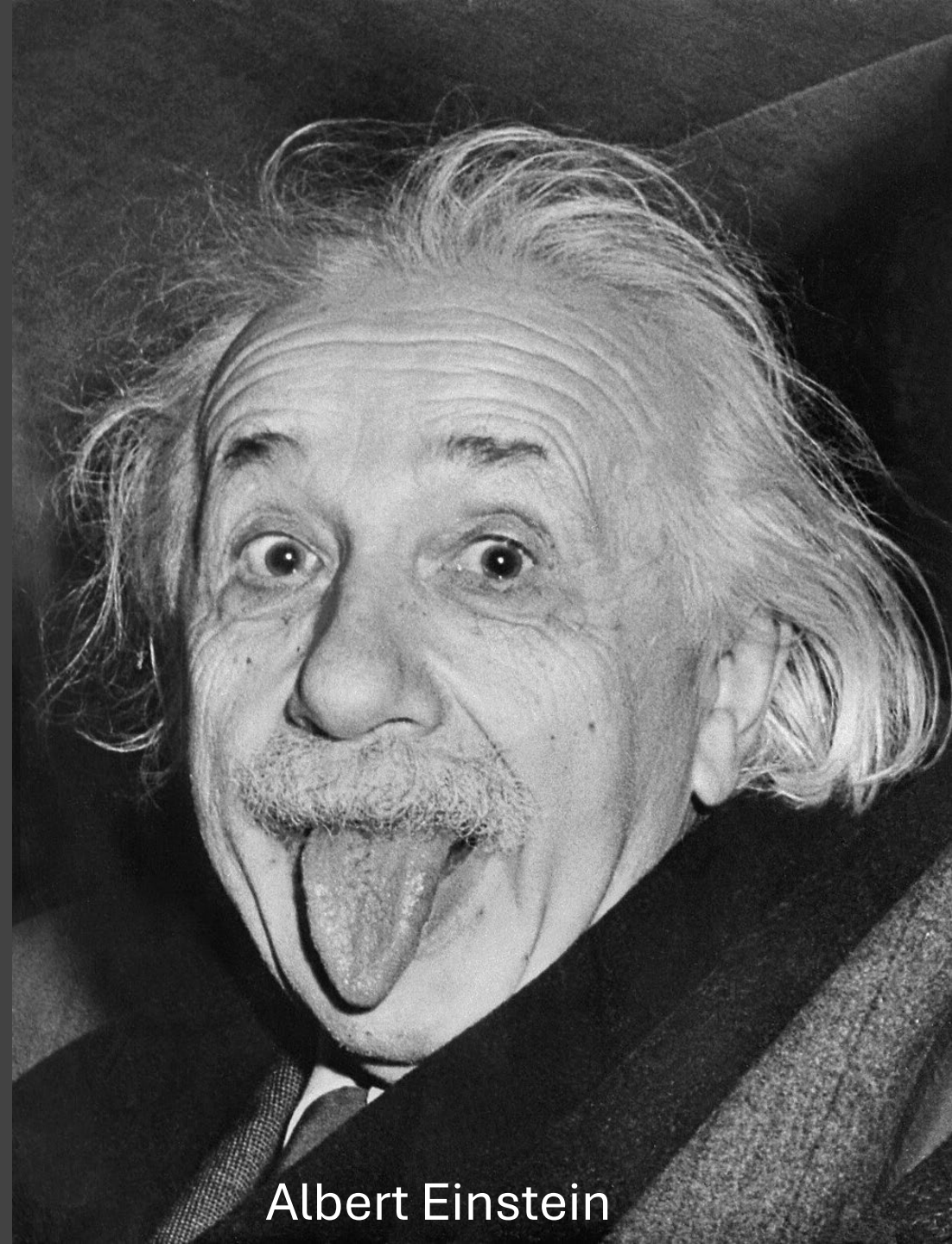


Routine Inspection Duration by State

(n = 434,259)



Insanity is doing
the same thing
over and over again
and expecting
different results.



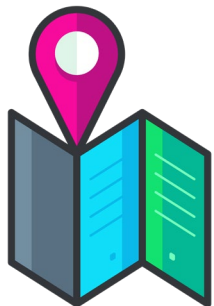
Albert Einstein

Characteristics of a Food Safety Culture

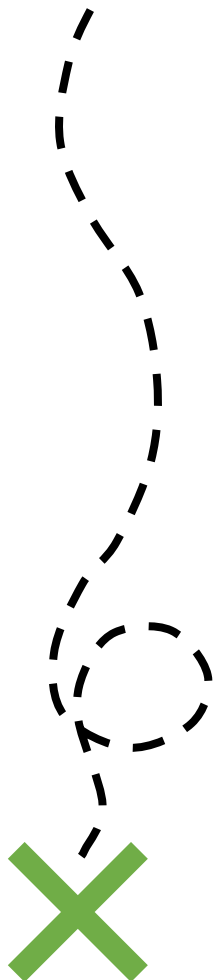
Regulatory Programs

- 1) Buy-in at all levels
- 2) Empower and reinforce through coaching and partnership
- 3) Establish food safety goals and measures for the regulatory program
- 4) Set expectations and consequences for food safety behavior





Characteristic	What It Means	Core Reminder	Why It Matters
1. Buy-in at all levels	Engagement from leadership to stakeholders to inspectors creates shared ownership of food safety.	<i>"Everyone on board."</i>	A unified mindset fosters consistent behaviors and reinforces a culture of prevention.
2. Empower & reinforce	Use support, not just authority, to build skills and confidence.	<i>"Coach, don't command."</i>	Empowered teams act proactively and feel invested in outcomes.
3. Set goals & measure progress	Define food safety priorities and track them with data.	<i>"What gets measured improves."</i>	Metrics guide focus, highlight risks, and show what success looks like.
4. Set expectations & consequences	Make safe behaviors the norm, with clear standards and follow-through.	<i>"Reinforce what matters."</i>	Consistency builds trust, accountability, and long-term culture change.





Activity – what would this look like?

What would these positive food safety culture characteristics look like at the following levels?

- Program
- Supervisor
- Inspector

Focus On Risk

Prioritize the risk factors

Identify biggest risks to food safety

Communicate For Change

Explain why it matters

Stay curious, use active listening skills

Document What Matters

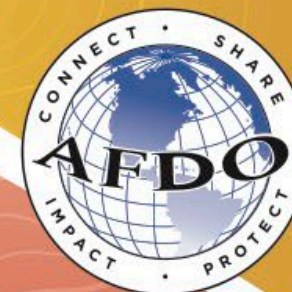
Prioritize risk factor violations

Only document severe violations of good retail practices

Think Prevention

Identify the "why" (root cause)

Empower the operator to control the risks



Focus on Risk



- Prioritize the risk factors
- Identify biggest risks to food safety

Think Prevention, Get to the Cause



- Identify the “why” (root cause)
- Empower the operator to control the risks

Communicate for Change



- Explain why it matters
- Stay curious, use active listening skills

Document What Matters



- Prioritize risk factor violations
- Only document severe violations of good retail practices

Thoughts?



Food Safety Culture as a Force Multiplier



Active Managerial Control = **What we want**

Food Safety Management System = **How**

Food Safety Culture = **Why**



Leadership Practices That Support a Positive Food Safety Culture – Program Level

Behavior	Impact
Explicitly communicating risk-based priorities	Aligns staff with public health outcomes, not just administrative tasks
Recognizing inspectors who make thoughtful, risk-based decisions	Reinforces values beyond checkbox compliance
Allocating resources toward inspector training, consistency, and well-being	Shows commitment to effectiveness and equity
Encouraging feedback and reflection (e.g., after inspections or recalls)	Builds psychological safety and trust

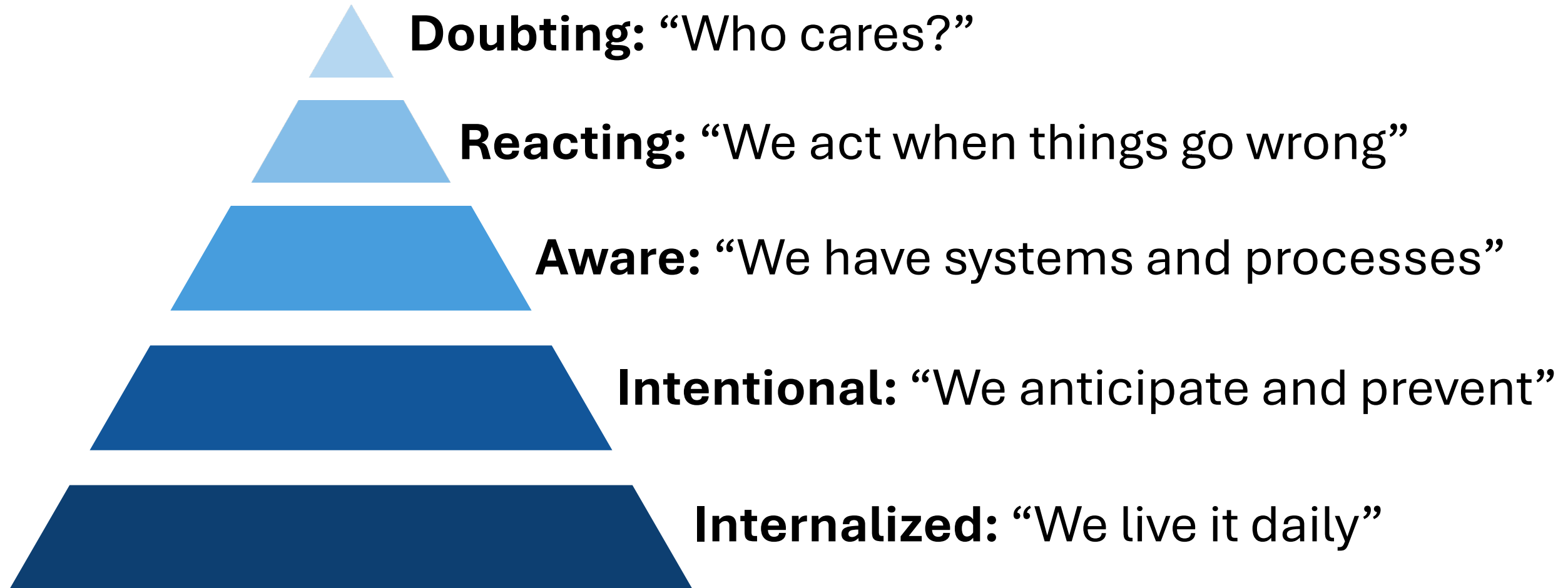


Leadership Practices That Support a Positive Food Safety Culture – Agency Level

Behavior	Impact
Explicitly communicating risk-based priorities	Aligns staff with public health outcomes, not just administrative tasks
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Food Safety Culture Maturity



What can you do to improve food safety culture in your agency?

1. What can you do in your daily work to promote FSC?
2. What can your organization do to promote FSC/PHC?
3. What is one strength of your agency's food safety culture?
4. What is one area you believe could be improved?
5. What's one small action you could take this month to improve food safety culture?
6. Who would you partner with to support this change?
7. What does strong leadership for food safety culture look like in your role?



