



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

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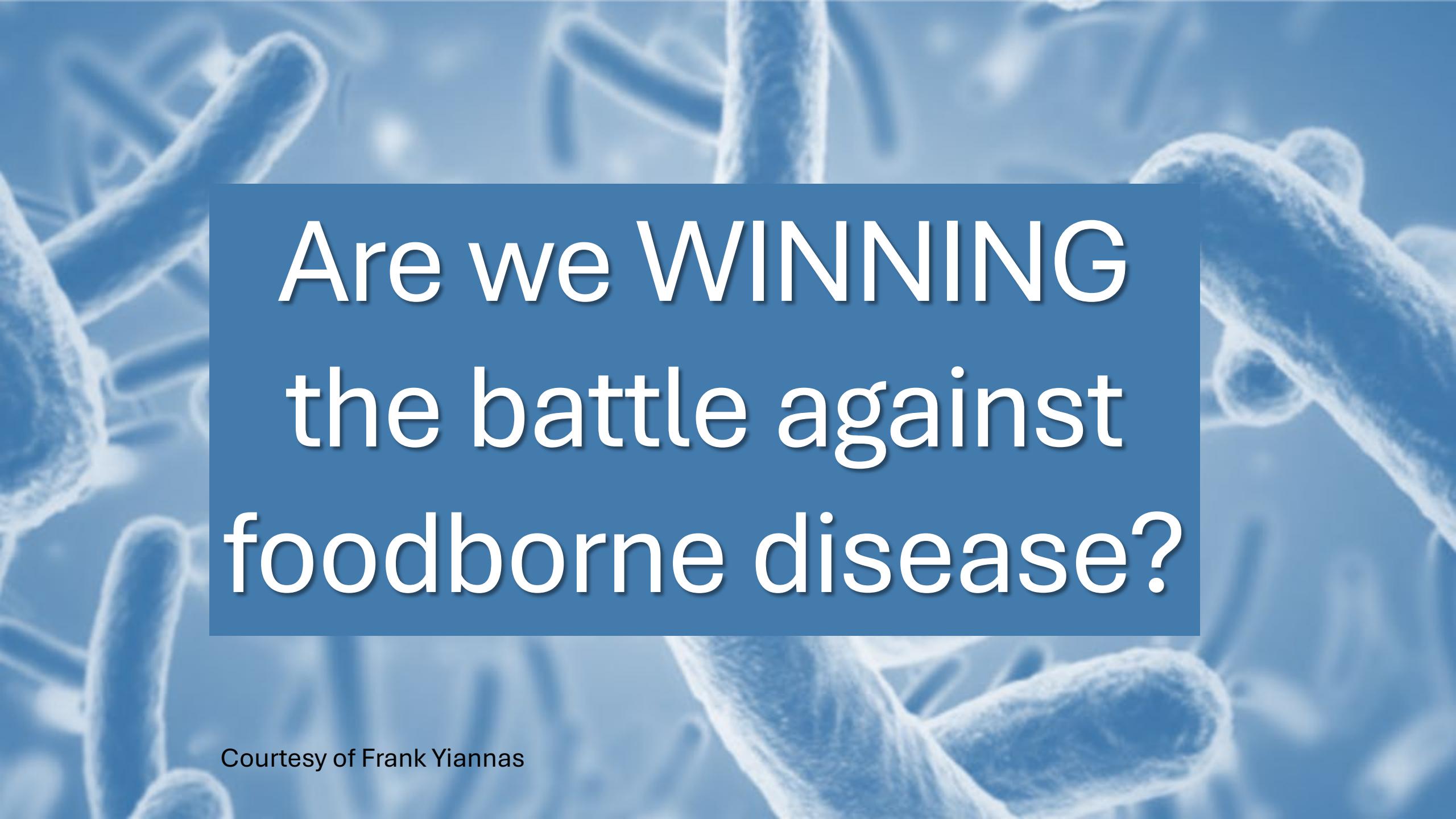
Retail Food Safety Regulatory Association Collaborative Cooperative Agreement



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

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Are we WINNING the battle against foodborne disease?

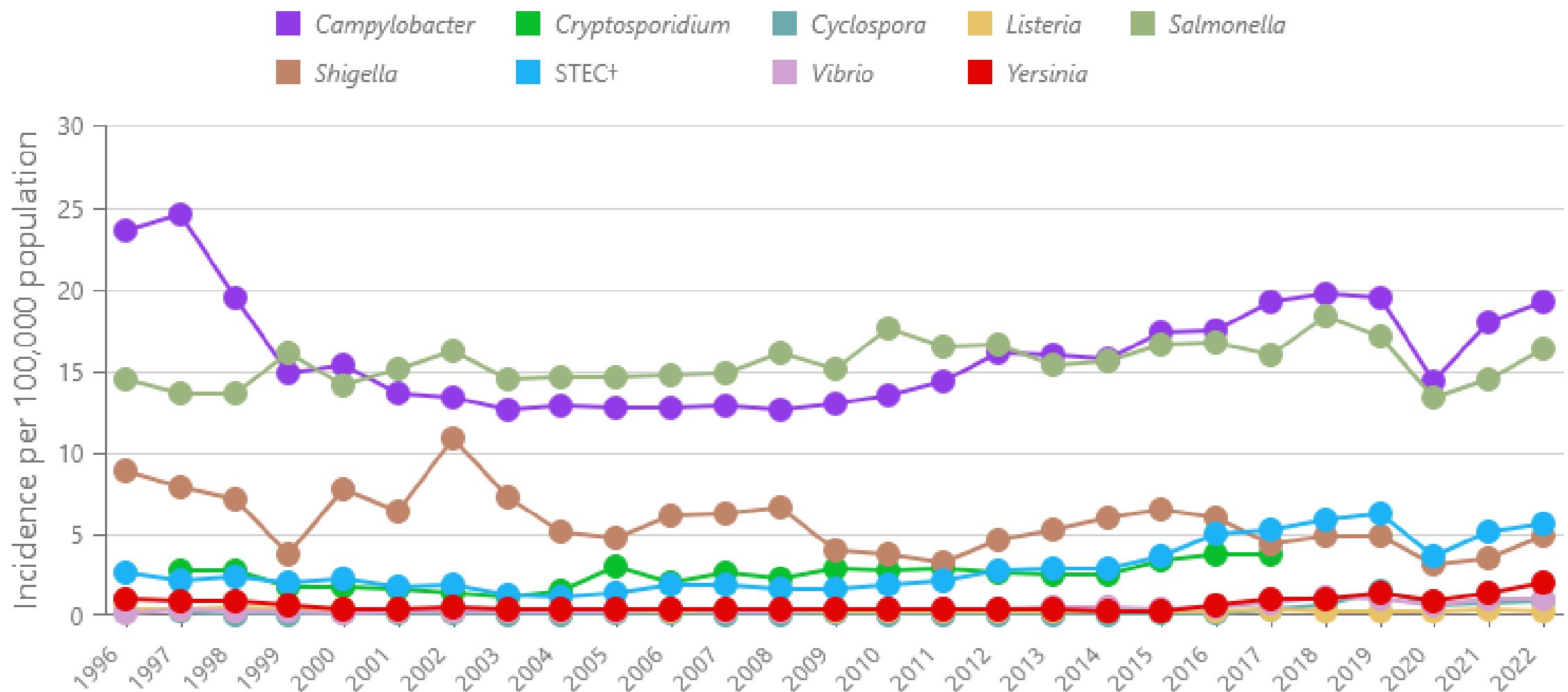
Courtesy of Frank Yiannas

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



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



Reported seeking **improvement ideas** from their inspectors



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



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?



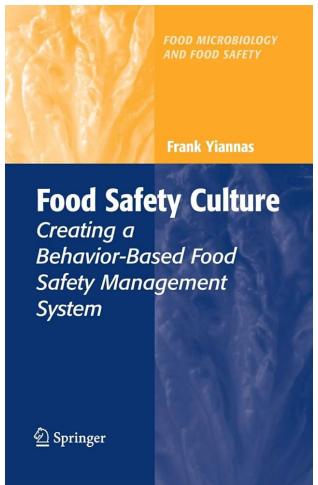
Culture is **shared patterns** of **thought** and **behavior** that characterize a social group, which are learned through socialization processes and **persist** through time.

- Social & Behavioral Foundations of Public Health

Courtesy of Frank Yiannas



2005



2009

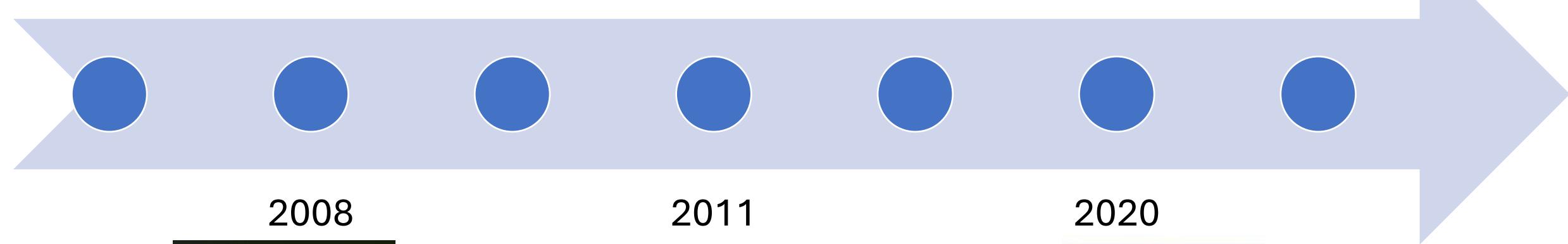


AU & NZ Pilot food safety culture & maturity models



Food safety culture required across all food businesses

2021/22



2008



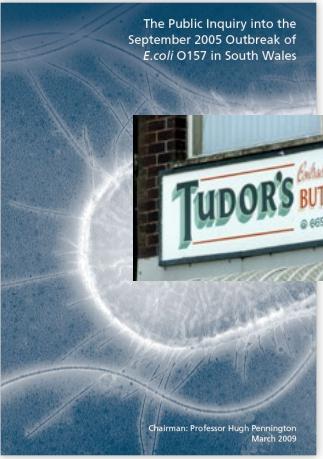
1st Food Safety Culture Conference



2011

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

2020



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

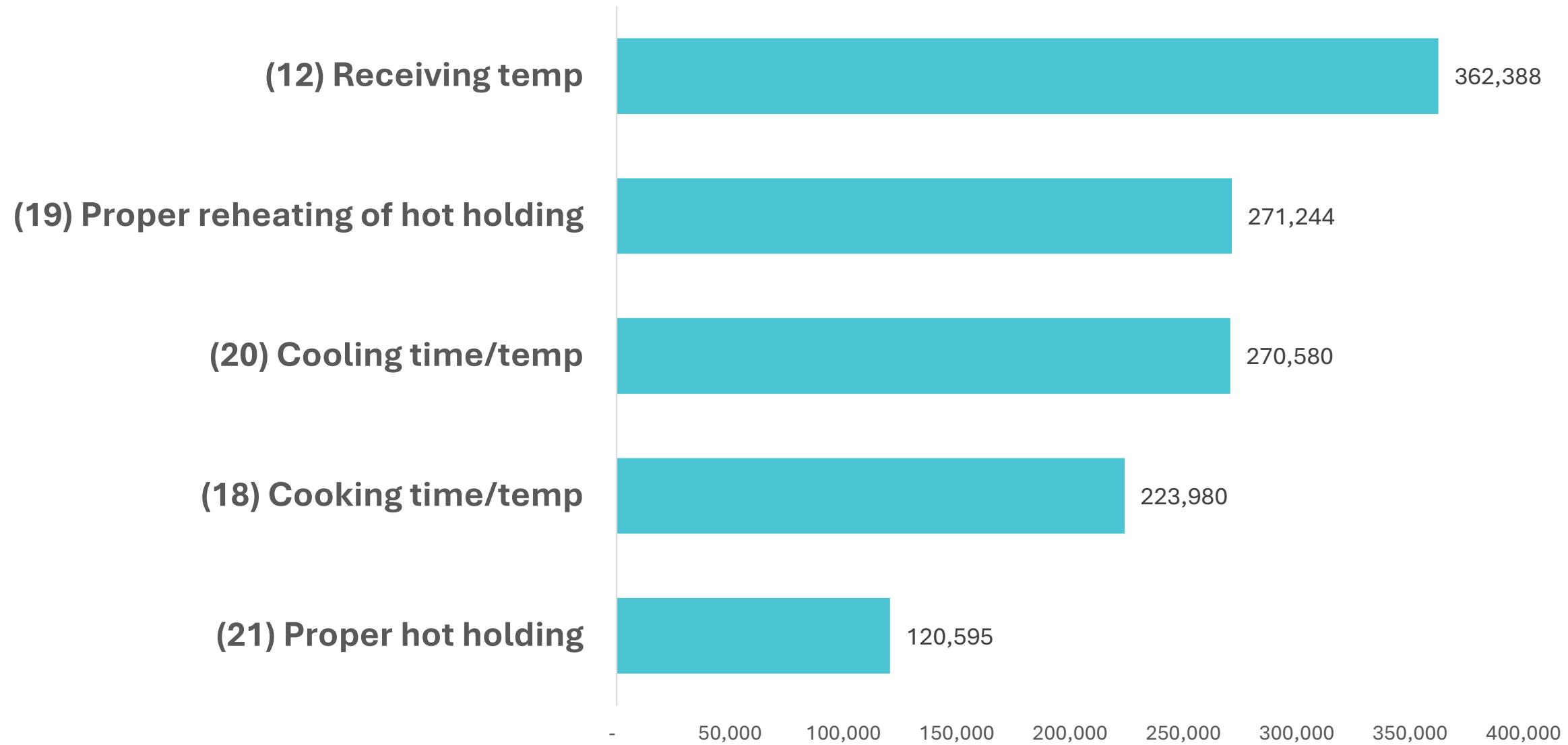
What You Might Be Thinking	Why This Matters for Regulators, Too
This is just for industry.	We help shape the culture we regulate. Where inspectors focus their inspections influences where operators focus their attention.
We inspect food, not feelings.	We already assess behavior and accountability. FSC 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

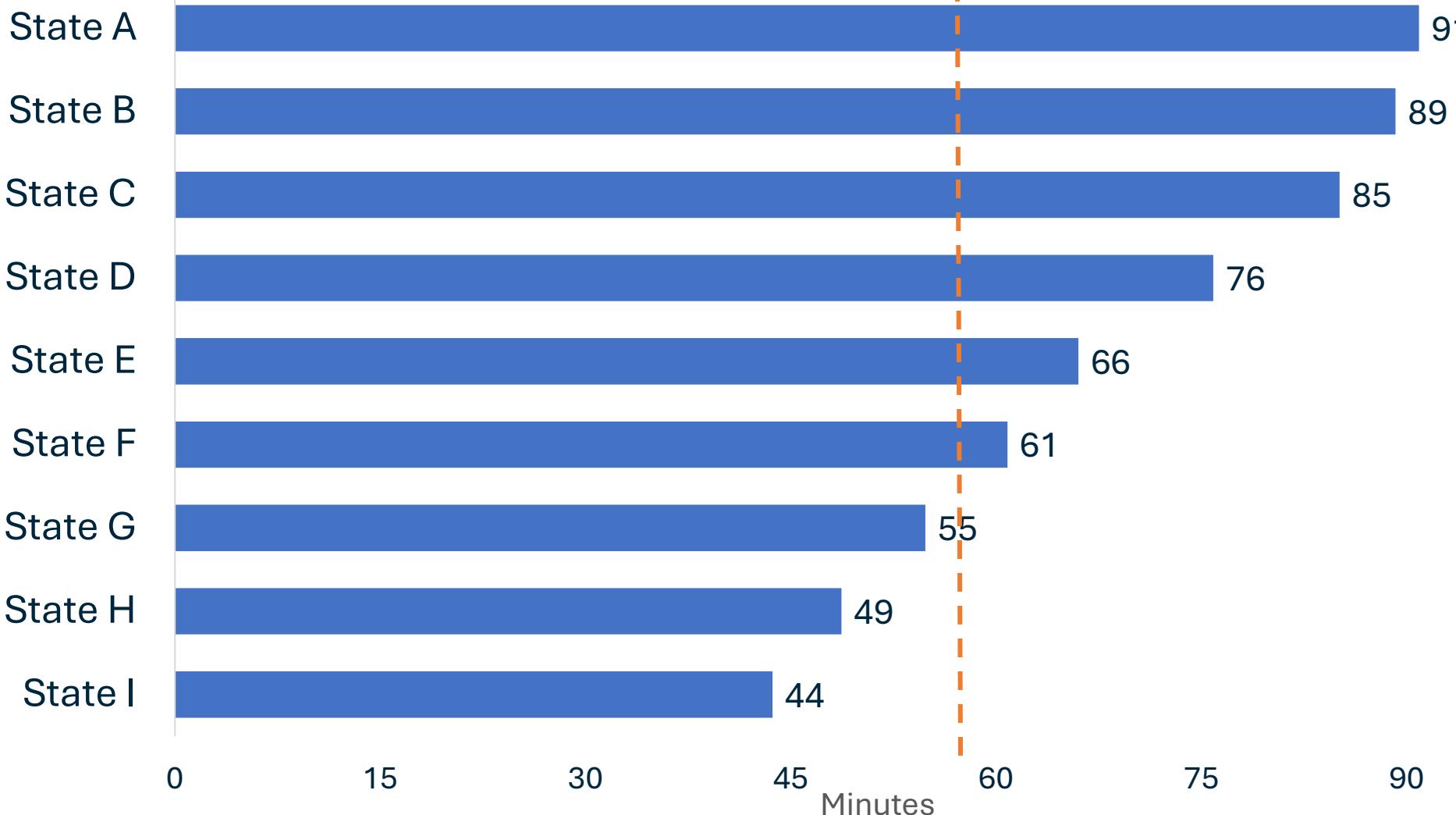
(n = 436,125)



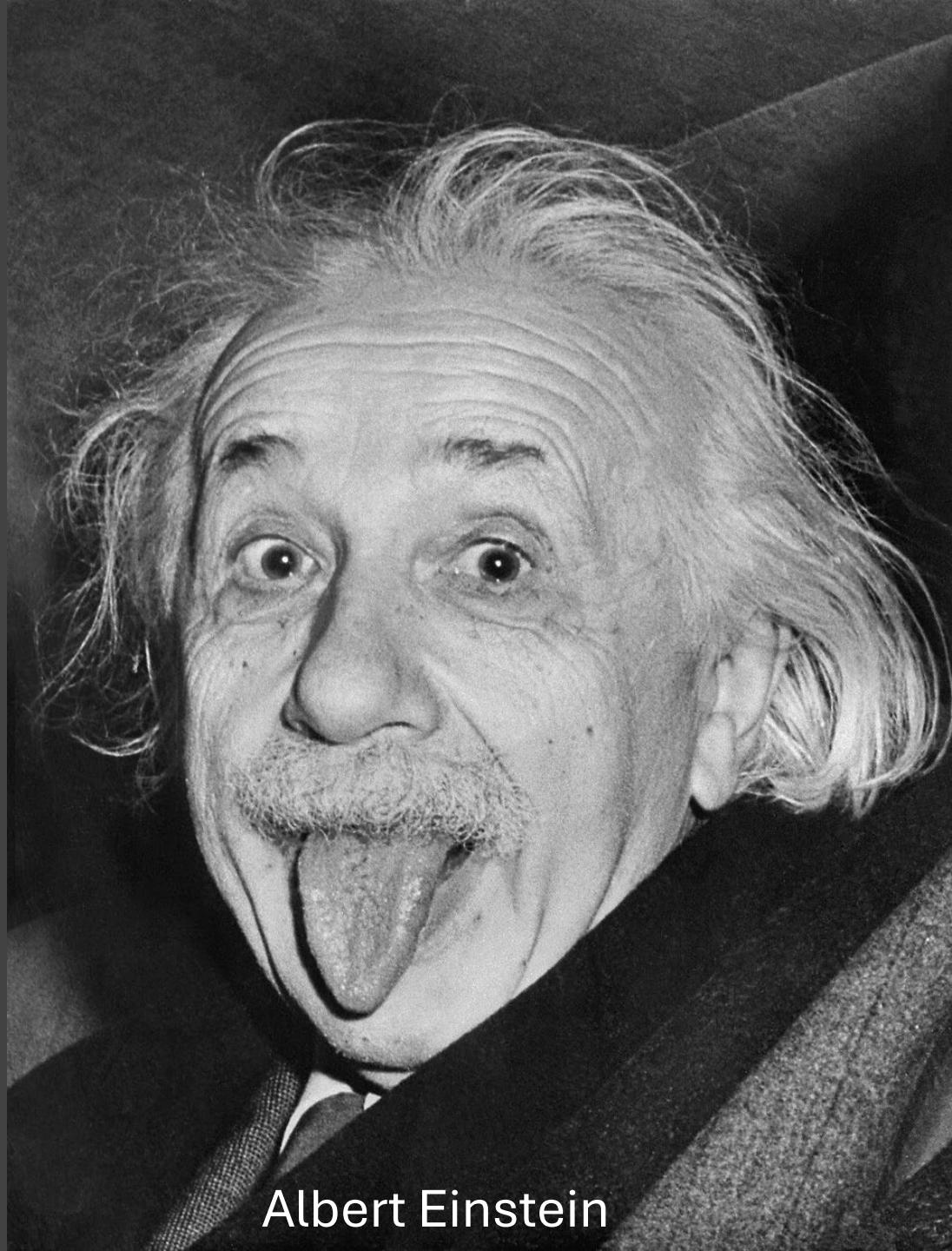
Routine Inspection Duration by State

(n = 434,259)

Overall Average = 59.2 minutes



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



Albert Einstein

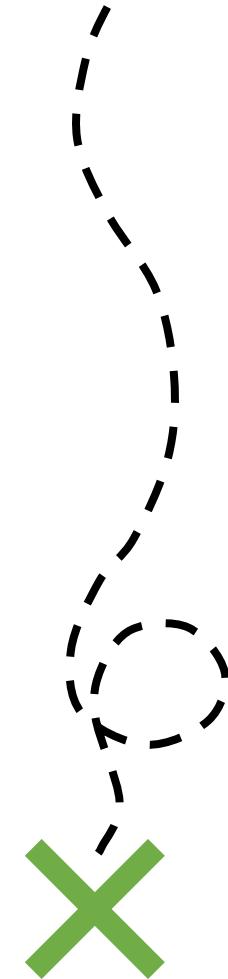


Characteristics of a Food Safety Culture

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



Think Prevention

Identify the "why" (root cause)

Empower the operator to control the risks

Document What Matters

Prioritize risk factor violations

Only document severe violations of good retail practices





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

Explicitly communicating risk-based priorities

Recognizing inspectors who make thoughtful, risk-based decisions

Allocating resources toward inspector training, consistency, and well-being

Encouraging feedback and reflection (e.g., after inspections or recalls)

Impact

Aligns staff with public health outcomes, not just administrative tasks

Reinforces values beyond checkbox compliance

Shows commitment to effectiveness and equity

Builds psychological safety and trust



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

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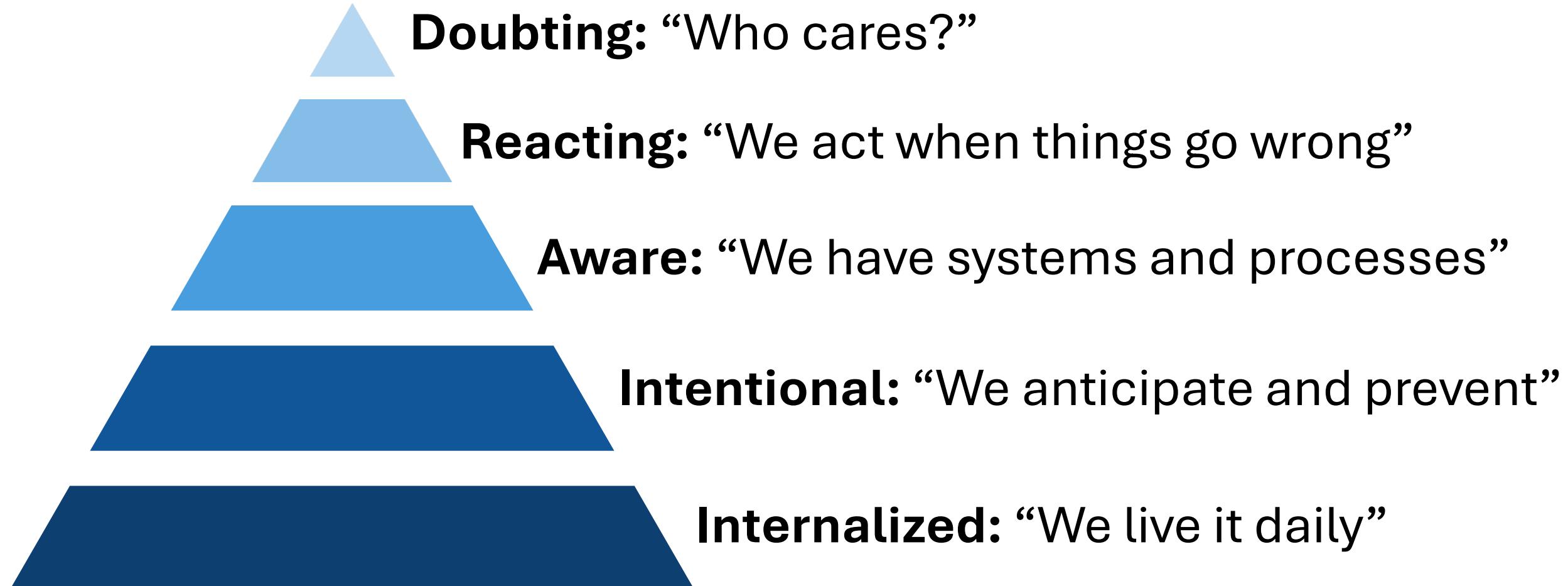
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Food Safety Culture Maturity



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?



