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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR: Nunez DATE TYPED: 2/6/03 HB HJM 15

SHORT TITLE: Investigate Food Safety SB _____

ANALYST: Dunbar

APPROPRIATION

Appropriation Contained		Estimated Additional Impact		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY03	FY04	FY03	FY04		
	NFI				

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Responses Received From

Department of Health (DOH)
 New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA)
 New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Joint Memorial 15 requests the New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Environment Department to establish a task force to evaluate the need for public education programs in proper food handling and to recommend legislation to the second session of the forty-sixth legislature based on task force findings.

Significant Issues

The task force would involve representatives from: retail food handling businesses, agricultural extension service, meatpacking and processing industry, New Mexico livestock board, restaurant and food service industry, and other interested parties.

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) supports a cooperative investigation of food safety with the Department of Health. NMED also supports establishing a task force to evaluate the need for public education programs in proper food handling. In fact, NMED already provides public education during health fairs, school presentations, during training classes for the

restaurant industry, brochures, bilingual videos, the New Mexico State Fair, and environmental educational conferences

Food borne illness is a significant public health concern. Collaboration between the New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Environment Department is crucial to preventing food borne illness. Several instances of food contamination that resulted from improper food handling have occurred in other states. Federal law provides for meat inspection at the processing facilities and state regulators provide inspection of retail facilities. Proper food handling represents a critical gap in the chain of food safety.

Some illnesses have been attributed to poor food handling techniques, unsanitary residential kitchens, high refrigeration temperatures, and improper storage of foodstuffs. Education is vital to the public concerning these basic issues. Many times the food processing industry is blamed for common food illnesses that may have started with poor home preparation of the food.

Occurrences of food borne illnesses have been increasing nationwide, as well as in New Mexico, and many could have been prevented with proper food handling. NMED food inspectors, directly involved at a grass roots level, impart proper food handling techniques during food establishment inspections, but with such limited staff, many times the knowledge transfer is insufficient. They also directly educate industry during product recalls and embargos.

With current world issues, threats of bioterrorism to our food supply are a focal concern of the food industry and consumers, as well. Public education programs could only enhance public awareness and increase protection to public health.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

HJM 15 will require staff time to implement and direct the Task Force. This can be done with current staff.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Food borne illness remains a significant cause of morbidity in New Mexico. DOH's Office of Epidemiology and the Environment Department collaborate to investigate numerous outbreaks each year; many are caused by improper food handling. Although there are federal laws "for meat inspection at the processing facilities and state regulators provide inspection of retail facilities," education on proper food handling may be inadequate. DOH's Strategic Plan specifies a comprehensive approach for preventing food contamination. It is a priority of the Office of Epidemiology. The Office has a Cooperative Agreement with CDC entitled "Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Cooperative Agreement" that promotes enhanced capacity for the detection, investigation, and reporting of food borne diseases.

If enacted, HJM 15 would require the formation of a Task Force which could be a significant mechanism to educate the food handlers on the proper handling of food, thereby reducing the instances of food-borne diseases. It also would raise the awareness about the causes of food borne disease and promote the education for their containment and control.

Currently some programs are functioning in the state related to this issue. The New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Agency (NMSU-CES) has a program to outreach to con-

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sumers and homemakers called Extension Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). This is a part time employee program where the extension employee demonstrates proper food handling, sanitation, and nutritional values of foodstuffs to the audience. The department of environment trains food service personnel at retail outlets concerning proper food handling techniques. These personnel do not perform training at the consumer level.

AMENDMENTS

The following language changes are suggested for clarity purposes:

Page 1, line 24: Insert “maintenance of proper” after “but”

Page 2, line 11: Insert “of food” after “proper cooking and handling”

BD/prr