

Communicating Pre-Harvest Food Safety to Diverse Audiences

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There have been and continue to be conferences and educational materials developed that present general information about *Escherichia coli* O157 and the state-of-the-knowledge regarding interventions to reduce meat and environmental contamination. However, these have tended to be directed to a specific audience (e.g., the meat industry or the scientific community), whereas relatively little has been done to bring diverse stakeholders together or provide multi-tiered approaches to educate the broader audiences involved with this issue, including those that regulate food safety at the federal level. The objective of a 6-hour Symposium : *Pre-Harvest Control of STECs in Cattle* was to engage regulatory personnel, other public health decision-makers and scientists in face to face discussion on STEC control. The conference was held in Greenbelt, MD and made available as a webinar. The agenda and videos of the symposium are available at

http://extension.wsu.edu/vetextension/ec/Pages/EcoliConf_2012.aspx

There were 50 direct (conference), 348 indirect (Internet visitors at the end of 2012) adult contacts. Participants were primarily federal or state government employees (45%) and those representing animal industries (26%). Questions were asked before the speakers began and again at the end of the symposium. Before the talks, 50% of participants agreed with the statement "Food safety policy and regulations in the United States are primarily based on risk assessment of the foodborne hazard" before the talks compared to 44% after. Most participants recognized that there was little reward for cattle producers to use pre-harvest interventions, and most disagreed that food safety policy and interventions should be focused on post-harvest control measures. After the talks, fewer individuals disagreed with the statement that "Adequate control measures exist for the control of other (non-O157:H7) STECs" (70% pre vs 61% post). At the end of the conference, more people disagreed with the statement "Cattle that are grass-fed have lower rates of E coli O157:H7 shedding than those that are fed high grain diets" (45% pre vs. 98% post) and more disagreed that most of the E coli O157:H7 shedding could be managed by changing the production system (51% pre vs. 71% post). At the end of the program all of the participants that responded to the questions in the program evaluations agreed or strongly agreed that they better understood the complexity of pre-harvest control; better understood how food safety policy is made; and were confident they could create an effective message about STEC pre-harvest control.