

# Showing Off Food Safety at Fresh City

**Employees demonstrate their food-safety training every day in front of an audience at Fresh City.**

**By Mary Boltz Chapman, Editor-in-Chief --  
Chain Leader, 5/1/2008**

At [Fresh City](#), food preparation is on full display. Workers at the 23-unit, Needham, Mass.-based chain prepare sandwiches, salads and stir-fry dishes while customers move along the production line. Customers can also create their own meal at an extensive salad bar. Not only do employees need to practice sound food-safety habits, they need to do so in front of an audience.

Training begins at orientation. New employees review the chain's food-safety and sanitation manual, which incorporates foodborne illness, handwashing, using gloves properly, how to take and record temperatures, etc. "We get into the whole process of how everything really affects food safety, from personal hygiene to making sure you're rotating product," says Fresh City Chief Operating Officer Bruce Reinstein. "We go over the whole gamut."

At first employees work in a classroom-type setting and take a written test. On-the-job training teaches more practical aspects such as cleaning and sanitizing different stations, checking temperatures and turning over product. Workers learn that they have to constantly check and rotate food in the steam tables and on the salad bar, whether the store is busy or not.

## **Safety Certification**

As employees advance from orientation throughout their jobs, they face ongoing testing that is updated periodically. If they pass certain milestones, they are certified and earn higher wages. Employees can be certified in areas such as guest service, different line stations and catering, but all must be certified in food safety and sanitation.

Reinstein says that even though unit workers are trained and tested at the outset and on an ongoing basis, they have to constantly be reminded because food safety can be the first thing that's forgotten about. "They might be more worried about making a salad or a sandwich as quickly as they can," he says, adding that it's the responsibility of managers and line supervisors to stay on top of it.



Fresh City tries to use the pride of being part of the show to reinforce good food-safety and hygiene habits.

Because customers can see how their food is prepared, don't workers have pride in keeping their own station clean? "You would hope so," says Reinstein. "And I think to most of them there is. Most of them like the attention of being on display, and they work hard. But there is a tendency to forget that you're being watched sometimes." Fresh City supervisors encourage workers to walk around the counter to look at their station from the guest perspective to remind them.



Customer education is part of Fresh City's food-safety effort as well, because they serve themselves from an extensive salad bar.

But Reinstein admits that some workers, particularly in today's labor market, just don't care. "Our job is to make them great, or get somebody else who wants to be great," he says. To try to get staff to care, Fresh City executives visit units often to spread and maintain the chain's culture. The company feels promoting food safety and sanitation has a large role in its position of serving a wide variety of only fresh food.

### **Tough Audience**

That variety and choice only makes the workers' job more difficult, according to Reinstein. He says customers know more than ever, and think they know even more, so staffers need to be prepared to answer questions about where the food came from and what's in it, including allergens. To support the employees, units also have a Know Your Food kiosk, which holds information on ingredients, nutrition, food safety and allergies.

Food safety will continue to be a priority for Fresh City as it expands. The chain, which debuted in 1998, expects to open five units this year, including its first in the Washington, D.C.-Virginia market. Plans call for accelerated growth the following year, and possibly university locations.

### **Snapshot**

**Concept** Fresh City

**Ownership** Fresh Food Concepts

**Headquarters** Needham, Mass.

**Units** 23

**2007 Systemwide Sales** \$28 million

**Average Check** \$8.50 to \$9 lunch, \$10 to \$11 dinner

**Expansion Plans** 5 in 2008



Fresh City's ingredients are prepped at the units, adding complexity to food-safety training