

Audits and inspections 'never enough': Expert critiques food safety procedures

September 18 2012, by Stephanie Jacques

(Medical Xpress)—There may be a disconnect between what consumers think food auditors are doing to ensure a safe food supply and what they actually are doing, according to Doug Powell, a Kansas State University food safety expert.

A professor of diagnostic medicine and [pathobiology](#), Powell and collaborators across North America have published "Audits and inspections are never enough: A critique to enhance [food safety](#)" in *Food Control*, a food science and technology journal.

"Food auditors provide a snapshot of production practices. However, buyers often believe auditors are performing a full verification of every product and process of food production," Powell said.

According to the article, many food safety outbreaks involve firms that have had their food production systems verified and received acceptable ratings from food safety auditors or government inspectors. One such occurrence was the [salmonella outbreak](#) linked to the Peanut Corporation of America in 2009 that recalled more than 3,900 peanut butter and peanut-containing products. According to media reports, a third party auditor was responsible for evaluating the safety of those [peanut products](#).

"There are lots of limitations with food safety audits and inspections, but with an estimated 48 million sick each year in the U.S. from [foodborne illnesses](#), the question should be how best to reduce the number of sick

people. We hope to kick-start that discussion," Powell said.

The article discusses how food safety audits and inspections are a key component of the nation's [food safety system](#) for both domestic and imported foodstuffs. However, recent failures in ensuring food safety bring in to question the effectiveness of solely using audits as the only preventative measure.

"Audit reports are only useful if the purchaser or food producer reviews the results, understands the risks addressed by the standards and makes risk-reduction decisions based on the results," Powell said. "So companies who blame the auditor or inspector for outbreaks of foodborne illness should also blame themselves."

The use of audits to help create, improve and maintain a genuine food safety culture holds the most promise in preventing foodborne illness and safeguarding public health, Powell said. If companies wanted specific standards for a product, even if it exceeded government standards, they would get it.

"The biggest challenges to solving the food safety issues we face currently are economic," Powell said. "Making the nation's food supply safe usually costs money and an investment in human capital. While inspectors and auditors play an active role in overseeing compliance, the burden for food safety lies primarily with food producers. Inspection efforts, even if doubled, would not be enough to make sure every food item is safe."

The collaborators on the article include Maria Sol Erdozain Paterno, a graduate student in marriage and family therapy and research assistant at Kansas State University; Katija Morley, a research assistant at Kansas State University; Chuck Dodd, who earned a doctorate in food science from Kansas State University in December 2010; Roy Costa, president

of Environ Health Associates Inc.; and Benjamin Chapman, assistant professor in the department of 4-H youth development and family and consumer sciences at North Carolina State University.

The article is available at [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ...956713512004409?v=s5](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/...956713512004409?v=s5) .

Provided by Kansas State University

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