

Preface

Food allergies are a significant public health concern, affecting up to 15 million Americans, and there is evidence that the prevalence of food allergies is increasing. Protecting consumers with food allergies requires an integrative approach that involves all sectors of the food industry and engages all who take part in the manufacture, preparation, and service of foods. Success can only be achieved with a broad awareness of the severity of food allergic reactions, a clear understanding of risk factors, and implementation of allergen control best practices. Significant advances have been made over the past two decades in our understanding of food allergens and in the development of control measures to minimize the public health risks associated with them (e.g., issuance of allergen labeling regulations, development of guidelines for managing allergens in food production and food service operations, and establishment of food allergy policies in communities and schools). However, broad and successful implementation of allergen controls is still needed. Many gaps exist, including the lack of hazard analysis and risk management approaches tailored to the needs of specific types of operation, absence of detailed documentation on best practices, insufficient dissemination of available information and resources to stakeholders, and shortage of tools and programs to train staff.

It is with these challenges in mind that a symposium entitled “Food Allergens: Best Practices for Assessing, Managing and Communicating the Risks” was held on October 14–15, 2015, in Burr Ridge, Illinois, to provide a forum where researchers, clinicians, and subject matter experts from the government, the packaged food and food service industries, academic institutions, and consumer groups came together and shared information, discussed current efforts, and recommended ways to address public health issues associated with food allergens.

This book, composed mostly of papers presented at the symposium, provides the most up-to-date information on allergen risk factors and innovative control measures applicable to different segments of the food chain, including manufacturers of packaged food, restaurants and other food service establishments, and at home. Key legislative initiatives that are in various stages of development and implementation at the federal, state, and community levels are also highlighted. The resources presented and experience shared will assist stakeholders in establishing best practices

that meet the needs of their specific operations for the assessment, management, and communication of food allergen risks.

Effective dissemination of allergen management information to all stakeholders across the entire food chain is needed. This will require strengthening the nation's education and outreach infrastructure and building expertise on identifying food allergen risks and developing allergen control measures. Enforcing compliance with existing regulations plays an important role in ensuring that allergen controls are effectively implemented. Proper training of state and local inspectors is critical. The information presented in this book will facilitate the development of educational materials and allergen management training programs for food production and service staff, extension specialists, and government inspectors. Consumers and other food safety professionals will also benefit from the information presented which will help them recognize and understand allergen control measures that are put in place across the food chain.

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Food Allergens

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