



Quality Food Analysis, Consultation & Training Services, LLC

P.O. Box 15906, Beverly Hills, CA 90209

323.823.1764 ? Qualityfacts@aol.com

fax 323.571.1889

May 2008: 10 Years of Restaurant Grading

Do you know about the grading system for restaurants and markets? My first encounter with the grading system was eleven years ago in 1997 when the grading system was first introduced to the inspectors and restaurants in Los Angeles County. After a public relations nightmare where a local news station conducted a hidden camera expose of dirty restaurant kitchens, the Los Angeles County Health Department responded by developing the grading system. I was an inspector in the West Covina/Temple City area of Los Angeles County and encountered numerous types of reactions to my putting the grade on restaurant windows. They ranged from confusion as to what the letter grade really meant; to anger that a restaurant received a "C" or that grades differed from inspector to inspector; to joy from restaurants who knew they deserved an "A" and finally had proof that they were a clean and safe operation. These concerns led to the development of a Quality Assurance Program that helped standardize all of the inspections and minimize differences in how inspectors conduct their inspections, and the creation of a Consultation and Technical Services Program that dealt with public relations issues with the media, other government agencies, and the food industry. I took a post in the Consultation and Technical Services Program where my job was to try and assist the food industry understand the grading system and to help improve their scores.

San Diego created California's first grading system back in 1947, but because of the news media interests, Los Angeles County's system became known globally. When the grading system was first implemented, only about 40% of the restaurants were receiving "A" grades. By mid-2007 (ten years after the grading system began), that number had improved to 82.5%. There are now numerous economic studies that have been conducted that show the impact the grade has on a restaurant's revenue.

Currently, we see grades in other parts of California, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Mississippi. New York State is also debating the use of the grading system and it may become reality soon. In all cases, the grading system is based on "risk." Violations with higher risks to cause illnesses have larger point deductions. Do you know the high-risk violations most likely to cause illnesses? Do your employees know these high-risk violations? Since the grading system seems to be a program that is here to stay and is expanding to various states and cities, please check your facility regularly to prevent these violations from occurring.

If possible, try to find either an outside consultant or identify an internal staff person who can regularly conduct an "inspection" of your kitchen to make sure that you are prepared for the real inspection. Additionally, five minutes a day of staff training would make all the difference. Why don't you try various methods to incorporate training into your workday? If you have any questions regarding sanitation or food safety, or require additional information regarding staff training or food safety inspections, please feel free to e-mail us.