Public Health Partnerships & Solutions

Robert W. Hicks
Public Health Partnerships & Solutions

Robert W. Hicks, Director
Office of Environmental Health Services
Virginia Department of Health
Food Safety Mission

- Prevent foodborne illness by ensuring that foods prepared and served by food establishments in the Commonwealth are safe, unadulterated, and prepared under sanitary conditions.
Virginia Overview

- 7.6 million residents
- 95 counties
- 40 cities
- 189 towns
- 27,500+ food establishments
- Food safety is not just ONE agency’s focus
- Partnerships are needed
Virginia’s Collaboration

• Instead of 324 agencies, created collaboration between state & localities
• Created 35 local health districts to provide public health services including food safety
• All localities contract with state Board of Health to provide uniform regulatory interpretation
Virginia’s Collaboration

- Partnership not limited to localities
- Departments of Agriculture & Health adopt same food safety regulations October 16, 2007
- Uniform interpretation and regulatory foundation
Example—Milk Safety

- Departments of Health and Agriculture partner in 1994 to regulate milk supply from farm to table.
New Challenges

Distribution of Foodborne Outbreaks by Pathogen Type (1990-2006)
Opportunities for Collaboration

• In 2007; Agriculture, Health, and state Laboratory combine to train over 300 regulators, clinicians, nurses, and epidemiologists on Outbreak Investigation with a special focus on intentional contamination
Next Steps

• Resource hurdle ($)

• Focus on the ‘risk factors’, continue to collaborate with existing partners

• Establish new partnerships with industry to tackle risk factors (poor personal hygiene)
Next Steps

• Cognitive hurdle

• Bringing ‘challenges’ into the light

• Finding new ways to communicate
  • Internet—Food Safety site
  • “Ask the Experts!”
Questions?