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Officials dig into food courses in B.C.

21 inspectors test samples at new training center

Elizabeth Willis
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Food inspectors and law enforcement officials from around the country are converging on Battle Creek to learn how to keep the national food supply chain safe.

Some of the first students of the newly created International Food Protection Training Institute are meeting this week at Western Michigan University's Kendall Center in downtown Battle Creek.

Some are food inspectors who are brushing up after their first year on the job, said Gerald Wojtala, a founding board member and project director the institute. Others are meeting there, in support of the institute, to learn how to protect food from intentional contamination by disgruntled workers or terrorists.

In a classroom setting, 21 food inspectors took food samples and temperatures of potato salad, chicken and hamburger while their teachers watched for proper technique.

Instructor David Lepkofker of the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets explained to the students which types of thermometers should be used in different scenarios. He prodded a slender digital device into a raw leg of chicken and then a fried piece.

"How come nobody yelled at me for not sanitizing in between raw and cooked meat?" he asked the students as they laughed nervously. He called it a "cardinal sin" of food preparation and urged students to be a model for the restaurant, school and factory workers they are testing.

Joanne Sax, a food inspector for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, said she appreciated increasing her knowledge of food laws and safety procedures. Although they can differ from state to state, the basics are the same, she said.

Creating a basic curriculum and national standards for food protection are a couple of the long-term goals of the International Food Protection Training Institute, Wojtala said.

National standards taught at the Battle Creek facility would help protect the global food supply chain while reducing costly recalls of contaminated product that can cause illness or death.

State law enforcement officials are also in the Cereal City this week supporting Battle Creek's efforts to develop a national food protection institute here in Michigan.

These law enforcement officials, representing the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Michigan State Police, Michigan Department of Corrections and others, are concerned about the intentional contamination of food, said Brad Deacon, co-chair of the state Food and Agriculture Protection and Defense Working Group.

They want to prevent, for example, disgruntled workers or prisoners from putting harmful products

into food, he said.

"We want to support the center and partner with what could be a great asset," Deacon said.

Elizabeth Willis can be reached at 966-0684 or ewillis@gannett.com.
