

Food Safety & Quality Impacts 2025

► Alabama Extension food safety and quality specialists help families, producers, processors, and food service workers stay safe from foodborne illness. They also conduct training that enhances employment opportunities, financial status, prospects for advancement, and overall quality of life.

Training to Sell Cottage Foods

Project Leaders: Bridgette Brannon

Institutional Lead: 1862 Extension – AU

Coleaders/Collaborators: Alice Moore, Christy Mendoza, Dani Reams, Emily Ferko, Janet Johnson, Juani Christian, Rebecca Catalena, Susan Hill

Background/Situation/Issue: The Alabama Cottage Food Law creates pathways for individuals to produce and sell certain foods from their homes while maintaining public health protections. To operate successfully within this framework, producers must understand food safety principles, approved processing methods, and required safety standards.

The Cottage Food Law Training program addresses this need by providing standardized, research-based education that supports both compliance and entrepreneurial success.

Outputs: In 2025, the Food Safety and Quality team delivered a standardized, 2-hour Cottage Food Law training program through both in-person and virtual formats, increasing accessibility across the state.

The curriculum included essential food safety practices and approved processing methods, such as canning, acidification, fermentation, and drying. Participants were required to pass a certification exam to demonstrate competency.

- 1,974 individuals successfully completed the training and earned certification.
- Certifications are valid for 3 years, supporting ongoing compliance.

Outcomes:

Short-Term Outcomes (Knowledge Gain)

Participants improved their understanding of the following:

- Food safety risks and prevention strategies
- Approved cottage food production methods



Figure 1. Alabama Extension Food Safety and Quality team.

- Labeling and established food safety standards

All participants demonstrated knowledge gain by achieving a minimum score of 75% on the certification exam.

Medium-Term Outcomes (Behavior Change/ Application)

Following training, participants reported intentions to do the following:

- Apply safe food handling and processing practices in home production
- Comply with labeling and sales requirements
- Initiate or expand cottage food operations

Approximately 90% of participants indicated plans to start or grow a home-based food business, reflecting adoption of both food safety practices and entrepreneurial behaviors.



Figure 2. Alice Moore leads a Cottage Food Law class, helping food entrepreneurs understand the regulations for selling homemade goods.

Long-Term Outcomes (Condition Change/Impact)

The program contributes to the following:

- Increased compliance with state cottage food guidelines
- Reduced risk of foodborne illness associated with home-produced foods
- Expanded economic opportunities through safe home-based food enterprises

Collectively, certified participants represent a potential economic impact of \$8,880,000 in home-generated revenue. The program also strengthens consumer confidence by supporting a safer, more consistent cottage food marketplace.

Audience Diversity:

The program reached a diverse statewide audience:

Gender: 90% female; 10% male

Age Distribution: 3% age 18 or younger; 49% ages 19–45; 29% ages 46–59; 18% ages 60–75; 1% age 76 or older

Race/Ethnicity: 74% White; 17% Black; 2% Hispanic; 7% Other

Evaluation Techniques: Program outcomes were evaluated using the following:

- A standardized certification exam requiring a minimum passing score of 75%
- Post-training demographic surveys to assess reach and participant characteristics

These evaluation methods ensure both knowledge acquisition and documentation of program impact across diverse populations.

Value Statement/Synopsis

The Cottage Food Law Training program delivers measurable value by combining food safety education with economic development. With a 199:1 return on investment, the program supports both conformance with established food safety practices and income generation for Alabama residents.

The 3-year certification period reinforces sustained knowledge and application, contributing to long-term public health protection and small business viability.

Revenue Generation: \$49,350

Social Media Channels:

www.facebook.com/acesfoodsafety

Key Web Page:

www.aces.edu/blog/tag/food-safety



Figure 3. Strawberry jam is one of the many food items that home cooks can legally produce and sell.



Figure 4. Rebecca Catalina demonstrates approved food dehydration techniques under Alabama’s Cottage Food Law, provided the product meets water activity requirements.



Figure 5. Bridgette Brannon (center) trained Rosemary Guilford (left) and Jennifer Bradley (right) in Cottage Foods and ServSafe as they launched and later expanded their Sweet South Market in Andalusia.

Food Safety Training for Food Service Workers—ServSafe

Project Leader: Rebecca Catalena, Janet Johnson

Institutional Lead: 1862 Extension – AU

Coleaders/Collaborators: Alice Moore, Bridgette Brannon, Christy Mendoza, Dani Reams, Emily Ferko, Juani Christian, Susan Hill

Background/Situation/Issue: Food service establishments play a critical role in protecting public health, as improper food handling can lead to foodborne illness outbreaks. National standards, including the Food and Drug Administration Food Code, emphasize the importance of having trained and certified food protection managers actively overseeing food safety practices.

The Food Safety Training for Food Service Workers program delivers certification-based instruction through the nationally recognized ServSafe program. This training equips workers with the knowledge and skills needed to reduce food safety risks, strengthen workplace practices, and support safe food service operations across Alabama.

Outputs: In 2025, the Alabama Extension Food Safety Team delivered 94 2-day ServSafe training courses across the state, with a focus on increasing access in both urban and rural counties.

The program included standardized instruction and proctored certification exams to ensure consistency and quality across all locations.

- 808 food service workers completed the training.
- 81% achieved certification by passing the ServSafe exam.
- Certifications are valid for 5 years, reinforcing long-term knowledge retention.
- Spanish-language instruction and materials were expanded through a partnership with Alabama A&M University.
- Participants who did not pass received an Hours of Training certificate valid for 1 year.



Figure 6. Juani Christian leads an Extension ServSafe class in Spanish for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Outcomes:

Short-Term Outcomes (Knowledge Gain)

Participants increased their understanding of the following:

- Safe food handling, storage, and preparation practices
- Prevention of foodborne illness and cross-contamination
- Time and temperature control, sanitation, and personal hygiene

Knowledge gain was demonstrated through successful completion of a nationally accredited exam, requiring a minimum score of 70%.

Medium-Term Outcomes (Behavior Change/ Application)

Training prepares participants to do the following:

- Implement safe food handling and sanitation practices in their workplaces
- Serve in certified food protection manager roles
- Apply standardized procedures that reduce food safety risks in daily operations

Food service establishments benefit from having trained personnel who can maintain safe practices during all hours of operation, supporting continuity of service and operational stability.

Long-Term Outcomes (Condition Change/Impact)

The program contributes to the following:

- Reduced risk of foodborne illness in food service settings
- Improved consistency in food safety practices across establishments
- Increased workforce capacity to support safe food systems statewide

The program also supports economic stability in Alabama's restaurant industry by helping businesses maintain trained staff and continue operations.

The training of 808 food service workers, with an average annual salary of \$31,672, represents a direct economic impact of \$25.59 million. Broader industry contributions further amplify this impact, as restaurant spending generates additional economic activity and job creation across the state

Audience Diversity:

The program reached a diverse workforce population:

Gender: 80% female; 20% male

Age: 96% adults; 4% youth

Race/Ethnicity: 53% White; 35% Black; 5% Hispanic; 4% Asian



Evaluation Techniques: Program effectiveness was evaluated through the following:

- A nationally accredited ServSafe certification exam requiring a minimum passing score of 70%
- Post-training surveys to assess participant feedback, training relevance, and perceived application of knowledge

These methods ensure both measurable knowledge gain and continuous program improvement.

Value Statement/Synopsis

The ServSafe training program delivers measurable public health and economic value by strengthening food safety knowledge and workforce capacity across Alabama.

In 2025, 808 food service workers were trained, resulting in an economic impact of \$25.59 million. With a 211:1 return on investment, the program demonstrates strong efficiency in delivering both educational and economic outcomes.

By equipping workers with current, research-based food safety practices, the program supports a safer food supply, enhances consumer confidence, and contributes to the long-term success of Alabama's restaurant industry.

Revenue Generation: \$121,200

Social Media Channels

www.facebook.com/acesfoodsafety

Key Web Page

www.aces.edu/blog/topics/servsafe



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