



Season 1 Episode 2—Food Product Innovation Center

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Terence Martin

(Intro with music) This is Food Defender podcast with Dr. Terence Martin, food safety and quality specialist at Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M University. Our Food Defender podcast covers everything that comes to food safety. For example, USDA guidelines, FDA guidelines, and just general consumer safety as it pertains to food.

Terence Martin

Welcome to Food Defenders. I am Dr. Terence Martin with Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M University. I'm the Food Safety and Quality Specialist here for Alabama A&M Extension, here on the campus of Alabama A&M. And this week we have in this podcast we have a special guest, a colleague of mine from, actually from here on the campus of Alabama A&M, one of the Alabama A&M very own Normalite, Dr. Elvis Baidoo, who's over in the Food Science department, Animal Science department. Dr. Baidoo, tell us a little about yourself and who you are.

Elvis Baidoo

Okay. Thank you very much. So, as Dr. Martin said, yes, my name is Dr. Elvis Baidoo. So currently I'm working with the Food Product Innovation Center, which is a new faculty, just, I mean we just started 2024 of August. And what we are doing is helping small entrepreneurs, starters, beginners. I mean, making small manufacturing industries, making food for the public. So, this is how we come in. So, we help test the food quality and safety to

ensure that we have helped you, the businessman, as well as helping the community, making sure that— because making food for sale, there is a serious business, you have to be sure that nobody eats your food and gets sick.

So, according to the Alabama Cottage Law, we make sure we test your food and then before you can take it to the department so that you can pass the Cottage Law and be able to sell and make some profits. So, we do a whole lot of tests for liquid foods, um, solid foods. We test all of them. We have pH. We have water activity. We have breaks, which is the sugar level. We also do shelf-life testing in case you need information on nutritional information that you tag on your product. We can also do that for you. And we can also conduct tests to tell you the expiry, I mean best before buy, I mean best before dates to consume and all that. So, this is what we do to help. Yeah.

Terence Martin

So yeah. So, this is, that's a new area over in our Food Science department. And I was blessed to be able to come out of that department. And I'm very excited that Dr. Baidoo is taking lead on that project there. He and I spoke earlier part of the, the year about which direction, uh, they were trying to go and give the community the opportunities to have a place, a resource to take a food product if they doing cottage law certified for their product and wanting to put it on the market to sell.

So now we have a opportunity, a place, a resource to be able to take those products. Because a lot of times out there, I get a lot of when I'm out in the community, they're gonna say, "Dr. Martin, you know anybody- that I got this sauce that I would like to have tested, the shelf life study or the pH, the viscosity and such," and now we, we actually have a department where we can actually...

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

...refer someone to you to be able to send their product to you and either at no charge or minimal charge some of the time...

Elvis Baidoo

Yes.

Terence Martin

...to be able to get your product out there. And in, in, in the long run, like we say, better safe than sorry. We want to make sure that it's safe.

Elvis Baidoo

mm-hmm.

Terence Martin

Yeah, you know, Dr. Baidoo his background is in food safety as well. So that's what, always at our forefront. And that's why we said better safe than sorry. Let's get it tested. You have a resource to have it done. Now Alabama A&M Food Science Department is called Food PIC ?

Elvis Baidoo

Food PIC, yeah. Food Product and Innovation Center.

Terence Martin

So now we have a opportunity to get that information out there. Like I said, I think that some of the people was using the University of Auburn. I think they don't do it as much anymore. So..

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

Hopefully we can have a new source here in north Alabama, a place where you can come and send your products, to have your testing and help meet those requirements with, you know, Cottage Law.

And we also possibly work with the nutrition labeling like Dr. Baidoo said...

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

You know, sometimes, you know, a lot of your products don't have to have it, but it's always good for the consumer to say, "Hey, this is what's in this product, the ingredients."

Elvis Baidoo

Yes. It gives information to the consumer how much protein he is consuming, how much fat, you know, so all that nutrition information is very, very important for the consumer. So, you need to have it on your product.

Terence Martin

Absolutely. And, and, and one of the things that we always talk about in the food industry that use buy, sell by date, the expiration date and so that that shelf life studies that he can and his team over there have, a lot of time he has some graduate students working on able to get that experience.

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

Before they get out in the industry, so speak.

Elvis Baidoo

Perfect.

Terence Martin

If you have ever been in the industry, you want to get some experience before you go out there. And so, this is going to give our graduate students some opportunity as well.

Dr. Baidoo and I had talked about doing some traveling. There is some certifications, cottage laws, going throughout the state.

So, he and I are going to look at their calendar and try to go out and travel and go to some of these certifications classes program. That way we can talk about your Food PIC program here at the university and give those resources.

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

Uh, to be able to tell, "Hey, this is what Alabama A&M has offered now."

Elvis Baidoo

I mean, I've talked to some of the clients—when the clients come, we talk to them—and some of them are saying that previously they were going to places like Atlanta to find laboratories. But now we have it here in Huntsville, you know, so all entrepreneurs, starters, business. You can come here with your food product for testing.

So far, we have helped a good number. We've had products like sauces, barbecue sauces. We've had juices. And we also provide service in formulation. In case you are already in production and you're trying to change your formulation, you can come to us, we'll work with you, to modify the ingredients so that you come out with a product that you really want, you know.

I remember I worked with one man who had corndogs. He was operating in a van, and he was using corn for corndogs. But it looks like it was giving me a lot of problems with the texture. When the customers came, he couldn't make the product as quick as he wanted.

So, he came. And then we added some rice and some other ingredients, and it developed a new method. Now when about ten people come looking for corn dogs, he can make it quickly. So, we devised that process for him, to fit him, you know, to fit his needs. And now he's out there making money.

Terence Martin

Great. And so that's what I was going to ask you, give us an example. And I was thinking about the example that right there that you had told us about, told me about. So, we have a lot of expertise in years, especially within the food science department, with Dr. Baidoo. One of the things we always say here in Extension a lot of time is if we don't know the answer, we'll find the answer.

Elvis Baidoo

We'll find it.

Terence Martin

We have a lot of resources. Whether it be here in the state of Alabama or a colleague throughout the country that we can reach out to when it comes to any issues or resources around food. All the way from the farm all the way to the table, we have resources that we can reach out to if you are starting a business in the food industry. Now, we do have a place and a point of contact, a person to go to. Now, I can say, "H ey, I'm going to give you this person, Dr. Badioo. So, I'll give him a heads up that this person may be contacting you...

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

..in order to take a look at their product.

One other program that here in Extension, we're talking about, we have a program called SOAP, that I'm leading charge on that. And I'm gonna bring Dr. Baidoo because it's going to kind of tie into what he's doing as well. Cause, you know, here in Extension we're usually out in the, in the community a lot more than our, our, counterparts, you know, on campus.

But SOAP is Safety Operation Application Program that we're going to be introducing. And it's basically along the same lines-- we'll be talking about food safety, educating on food recalls and those type things. Those questions that can be answered, prior to if you can't reach Dr. Baidoo and you happen to be at one of these programs that we'll be doing, ah, you can come to me as we talking on our SOAP program, and I can lead you to Dr. Baidoo.

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

Because, like he said, he helps with processing, start up processing. Those are type things that we, our SOAP program is there to help you do as well and give you those food safety tips and also do some, you know, sensory... people when it comes to food safety....say I can't smell, if it smell bad, of course as you get older your sensory changes.

Elvis Baidoo

Yes.

Terence Martin

Yeah. So, it's something that, you know, because it don't smell bad doesn't mean it's not bad and safe for you. So, we look forward to this program and getting it off the ground with Dr. Baidoo. He and I- he mess around. He may get more than he ask for. He may be overbombaraded, which is a good thing, you know?

But like I said, the Food PIC is, is, I'm excited about...

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

... bringing that to fruition and continuing to grow it over to the, over the months to come. As well as the years to come. And as we grow and get more technology-- rapid turnaround, know that was, one of the things.

So, can you kind of give us an estimate if I brought you a product, say, like a sauce, estimate time, say if I wanted the order activity, analysis and maybe, viscosity?

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

What? What general turnaround time that would possibly be the results?

Elvis Baidoo

So, so currently I'm working with two graduate students and, and, you know, sometimes we don't want to be overwhelmed, you know, but maybe I can talk about an experience last November.

So, we had a client that that brought in five samples, like, we have five brands, okay, of the same sauce, but they are different brands. We have a white one and red one. You know, a spicy one and one which is not spicy. They have different names. So normally, that took me and one grad student two weeks to give the results out.

We conducted water activity pH and viscosity so the turnaround is, is fast because this is what we do, you know. I spent majority of my time on the Food PIC making sure—even though I have other responsibilities, like, a in, in the product development lab, I also help some of the graduate students do their projects.

But majority of my time is spent on client work. When we have an individual from the community who has a product and wants it tested, I spend all the time. So, it's like for five products we spent about seven working days to be able to finish it.

Terence Martin

Okay, that's a really good turnaround because I think in, in some, some place in some laboratories the backlog gets so build up.

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

And as a customer, a client, you know, I'm, I'm, get excited what's going on, my results. You know, if I don't have it out on the market. So that's a fairly good turnaround time to give you an idea, ah, the results on your product.

Elvis Baidoo

There was also one lady who was working with—she had freeze dried fruits and candies that we also worked on.

She had—first, she brought eight different kinds of products. And that took us a week because we're only working on water activity, you know, so that was pretty fast. We spent one week. We gave her her results. Currently, we are not charging, but, we say that if you can make a donation, you know,

Terence Martin

Absolutely, absolutely.

Elvis Baidoo

... that's we are doing right now. Yeah, but currently when the clients bring their products, we do not charge them. But we ask them to make a donation if they want, you know. There was one lady, an entrepreneur from Birmingham, who just wanted the nutrition information on her, on her sauce product, it was a barbecue product. So, she didn't have to come to us, we just talked on the telephone, you know.

Terence Martin

Right.

Elvis Baidoo

And then and then on the internet, she just sent me a picture of her product, and I asked her for all the ingredients and the amounts that she used.

Terence Martin

Right.

Elvis Baidoo

And then we use that information to develop the nutrition information for her. And now she, she's okay with that. I mean, her products are on the shelf right now selling.

Terence Martin

Great, great

Elvis Baidoo

So yeah.

Terence Martin

And so, you don't necessarily sometimes have to have your product physically, especially when it comes to nutrition...

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

All they need is the data-

Elvis Baidoo

...the information

Terence Martin

-information and the ingredients and the amount. And they can put it in a system and give you the information that you need,

Elvis Baidoo

...that you require.

Terence Martin

...that's required. And that is great.

And like I said, the Food Science Department, Dr. Baidoo, have great resources around him. He has a food micro lab...

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

...lab there with Dr. Davis and her, probably her graduate students. And we have food engineering. We have food processing. And so, he has a great, great resources around him.

Elvis Baidoo

Yes.

Terence Martin

And then as well as Alabama Cooperative Extension with us, the outreach arm, to be able to get you in touch and get these resources here at the university with the—if you have a new product and you want to get those analysis, and you have concerns about your shelf life and whether separation, those type things, we have specialty and people that has background in that. Once again, I, we appreciate Dr. Elvis Baidoo coming in. Dr. Baidoo how can you be reached?

Elvis Baidoo

Well, so, apart from my email address, you can also reach me on my office telephone 256-372-1160. I don't know, should I also talk about my email address?

Terence Martin

Yeah, go ahead and get it.

Elvis Baidoo

So, my email address, ELVIS elvis.baidoo@amu.edu. Maybe I should go over again. Elvis. elvis.baidoo@amu.edu.

Terence Martin

Absolutely, we sure appreciate Dr. Baidoo coming on our second episode “Better Safe Than Sorry.” We hope this podcast takes off because it is always good to talk to a fellow people in the food industry to kind of give our community just basic general, information, you know. As, as we are scientists...

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah,

Terence Martin

... sometimes we get tied up in, in the scientific world and use these big terms, but we want to give the general knowledge, opportunities for our consumers out there where they can actually layman's term, where they can relate to...

Elvis Baidoo

Yes.

Terence Martin

We started talking about monosodium glutamates and stuff like that, people are lost. And so, but we want to be able to give it in layman's terms, what we, we can offer and what Dr. Baidoo and his team over there at the university offer.

Elvis Baidoo

Yeah.

Terence Martin

Once again, my name is Dr. Terence Martin. I'm the Food Safety Specialist here at Alabama A&M Extension. I can be reached at 256-372-4973 or tzm0018@aces.edu or Terence Terence.martin@aamu.edu.

So, it's been great. Once again, be better safe than sorry and knowledgeable of what's going on around you...everything food.