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Executive Summary

This report presents a summary of food safety-related findings identified through survey responses provided by U.S. artisan, farmstead, and specialty cheesemakers.

Key findings from the 2018 survey include:

- 75% of cheesemakers used pasteurized milk to make cheese; half used unpasteurized milk with no heat treatment; and 17% used unpasteurized milk with some heat treatment.
- Cheesemakers most commonly noted aging cheese from 60 days to 89 days with 59% noting that they age cheese for this time range. Cheesemakers were less likely to age cheese for longer than nine months.
- 81.5% of cheesemakers reported having a current food safety plan in place at the time when they responded to the survey. This is a significant increase from the 2016 report. At that time, just 59% of participating cheesemakers reported operating with a food safety plan.
- Cheesemakers who are ACS members are more likely to have a written food safety plan in place. In 2016, 72% of members indicated they had a plan compared with 89% in 2018. Just 37% of cheesemakers who weren't ACS members reported having a written food safety plan in place in 2016; however, 70% of non-members said they had a plan in 2018.
- Cheesemakers who didn't have a food safety plan were more likely to operate smaller cheesemaking businesses; approximately 25% of cheesemakers producing less than 20,001 pounds of cheese per year did not have a food safety plan.
- The majority of cheesemakers' food safety plans included sanitation, standard operating procedures, and good manufacturing practices. Other top components included in their plans were chemical use, traceability, product recall, and employee health and hygiene. It was much less common that cheesemakers included a crisis management component in their plans.
- 59% of cheesemakers reported that they conducted microbial testing. This is down from the 2016 report in which 71% indicated that they conducted microbial testing.
- ACS members were more likely to conduct microbial testing than non-members, indicating such testing at a rate of 58% compared with 27% for non-members.
- Use of pathogen testing increased from 2016 to 2018. In 2018, 45% of cheesemakers reported that they conducted pathogen testing, compared with 39% of cheesemakers in 2016.
- 63% of cheesemakers reported that they had previously had an FDA audit or inspection. 37% reported that they had never been audited or inspected. This is consistent with results reported in 2016.
- Of the cheesemakers surveyed, 59% strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that information regarding FDA's regulatory requirements is easy to understand.