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Sept. 6, 2022

**NMSU, NMDA food protection center receives grant to create  
listeria control specialists in New Mexico**

*Funding awarded through USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program*

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LAS CRUCES, N.M. – The Southwest Border Food Protection and Emergency Preparedness Center (the Center) at New Mexico State University has been awarded a United States Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant titled “Creating Listeria Control Specialists in New Mexico Packing Houses and Processing Plants” in an effort to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in New Mexico through an increased understanding of the threats to food from microbial hazards. Managers from packing houses and processing plants in New Mexico may enroll in the “Listeria Control Specialist Certificate Program” and become the local expert for controlling listeria monocytogenes in their facilities.

In collaboration with the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) and New Mexico commodity groups, this program will be available at no cost to the attendees. The deadline to [enroll](#) is Thursday, Dec. 1 or when 30 individuals have applied, whichever occurs first.

Listeria is a bacterium that acts as an intracellular parasite for humans and most mammals that causes an infection called listeriosis. Symptoms of listeriosis can include headache, fever, abdominal pain and, in some cases, can lead to death. Listeriosis outbreaks have been linked to raw dairy products, raw vegetables and processed fruits. The Center is looking for approximately 30 specialty crop personnel in New Mexico to enroll in the online program to fight the ongoing safety concern caused by listeria outbreaks.

“In response to the ongoing food safety concern posed by listeria, the Center is pleased to partner with the International Food Protection Training Institute to enhance food safety in New Mexico by providing the Listeria Control Specialist Certificate Program,” said Marshal Wilson, co-director of the Center. “This training is provided at no cost to

processors or packing houses that handle specialty crops, in an effort to decrease food contamination by listeria.”

The listeria program is comprised of five distinct online courses that include:

- Good Manufacturing Practices in Food Manufacturing Facilities
- Hygienic Zoning in Food Manufacturing Facilities
- Environmental Monitoring in Food Manufacturing Facilities
- Sanitation Controls in Food Manufacturing Facilities
- Hygienic Facility and Equipment Design in a Food Manufacturing Facility

Upon completion of the five online courses, learners will receive a “Listeria Specialist Certificate” issued through the International Food Protection Training Institute (IFPTI). IFPTI was developed by experts from the American Frozen Food Institute, which promotes food safety and practices across the United States and, now, in New Mexico.

“This is a great program to enhance food safety in the state,” said New Mexico Secretary of Agriculture Jeff Witte. “The Center has been a model to deliver effective training and response programs for the agriculture and food sector.”

Through enhanced competitiveness of specialty crops, the goal of this grant program is to improve food access in underserved communities and improve the development of local and rural food systems. Specialty crops included in the listeria control program include some of New Mexico’s largest commodities: pecans, onions, chile and lettuce.

“Our goal at the Center is to maintain a safe and consistent food supply, not only for New Mexico, but for the entire Southwest region, and this grant will allow us to do that,” said Tom Dean, Extension Southwest District Director and co-director of the Center.

“With the continuing supply chain issues, this grant will create localized specialists in listeria control that will help better the local food supply.”

For more information about listeria control specialists, please visit the [IFPTI website](#) or email the Center at [swcenter@nmsu.edu](mailto:swcenter@nmsu.edu).

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