



# The Food Safety Consortium Newsletter

Spring 2026

The latest news, views, and announcements

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## Message from the Chair

- By Dr. Sadhana Ravishankar



As the Chair of the University of Arizona Food Safety Consortium (FSC), I would like to extend a warm welcome to our food safety community from this first issue of our newsletter. Our core purpose is to tackle critical food safety challenges from farm to fork, bridging academia, industry, and government to protect public health across Arizona and beyond. Our diverse members include research teams, extension specialists, industry professionals, regulatory/government officials, local business owners, nonprofit organizations, and students, all united to foster innovation and collaboration. Through our newsletters, our FSC members will stay informed on key updates and events, such as our annual Food Safety Conference, open-monthly meetings welcoming all participants, webinars with guest speakers sharing frontline expertise, and student-focused initiatives encouraging next-generation leaders. Membership and events remain free and open to anyone passionate about food safety research, extension, or related issues. Hope you all will join us in this vital mission to solve critical food safety challenges, maintain food safety standards and in building a healthier future for our society. I would like to thank our newsletter team for their efforts in this endeavor to keep us all informed regarding the activities of the University of Arizona- FSC. Please spread the word about the University of Arizona-FSC and let's all work together to improve and ensure food safety across Arizona and beyond!

# The Food Safety Consortium Newsletter

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## From the editors

- By: Hope Wilson and Dr. Margie Sánchez-Vega

As the newsletter resumes after a hiatus, I am pleased to serve as co-editor. I have been involved with the Consortium in some capacity beginning 2013. As an Associate Agent with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, I manage food safety education and food preservation programs in Yavapai County. If you would like to share an event or article about your research or food safety role, please contact either Margie or me.



-Hope

Happy new year! It is an honor to be part of the Food Safety Consortium and help shape the newsletter. This is my first time doing something like this, so I am always open to ideas and suggestions. Want to recommend something to us for the next issue? Want to contribute a section? Send us an email and we will make it happen. I hope you enjoy this new lighter version of the newsletter.



-Margie

## Featured Space: What is Cyclosporiasis?

- By: Dr. Gerardo "Jerry" Lopez



Cyclosporiasis is caused by *Cyclospora cayetanensis* a coccidian protozoan parasite known to only infect humans and a disease emerging as a global public health and food safety concern. In the United States, laboratory confirmed cases of domestically acquired cyclosporiasis have been reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to have significantly increased from hundreds to thousands annually since 2018. Reported illnesses and multi-state foodborne outbreaks are primarily associated with the consumption of fresh produce such as herbs, leafy greens, and berries. Unlike most parasites, *C. cayetanensis* oocysts are not transmitted through direct fecal-oral contact rather *C. cayetanensis* oocysts require 1-2 weeks in the environment to sporulate before becoming infectious. *Cyclospora* infects the small intestines and typically causes watery diarrhea along with other common symptoms: loss of appetite, weight loss, abdominal cramping/bloating, nausea, prolonged fatigue. Other symptoms can include vomiting, body aches, low-grade fever, and other flu-like symptoms. If untreated, the illness may last for a few days to a month or longer and may follow a relapsing course. Cyclosporiasis can be treated with an antibiotic regimen of trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX), sold as Bactrim, Septra, or Cotrim. Although how environmental contamination of fresh produce occurs is not fully understood, the detection of *C. cayetanensis* in several types of water, including surface water, wastewater, and in some cases drinking water, suggests water as a vehicle. In the U.S., surveillance data indicates a clear seasonal trend in cyclosporiasis with cases concentrating in the spring-summer seasons. The best way for people to prevent infection is to consume fresh produce that has been thoroughly washed and to be extra cautious when traveling to endemic areas, such as tropical and subtropical regions.

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## Food Trivia

- By: Dr. Margie Sánchez-Vega

Here is some random Food trivia for everyone's enjoyment!

### 1. Which two spices are the most popular in the world?

- The two top-selling spices worldwide are pepper and mustard. If you guessed "salt," you would be wrong because salt is not technically a spice, it's a mineral.



### 2. Which country is the largest producer of saffron, the world's most expensive spice?

- Almost everybody would think Spain, because of the popularity of that spice in Spanish cuisine, but the correct answer is Iran!



### 3. Where was the Caesar Salad invented? Where did the name come from?

- This popular salad was invented in Tijuana, Mexico, not Rome, around 1924, during a July 4th rush. Despite the name, it has nothing to do with Julius Caesar; it's named after its creator, Caesar Cardini, an Italian-American chef.



### 4. Where was the "Chinese takeout" box invented?

- The iconic, white, wire-handled Chinese takeout box—technically an "oyster pail"—was patented by American inventor Frederick Weeks Wilcox in 1894. Originally designed to carry raw oysters, the single-piece, leak-proof foldable design became synonymous with Americanized Chinese food during the post-WWII. While iconic in the United States, these containers are not used in China.



### 5. Where is the only McDonald's in the world with blue arches located?

- The only McDonald's with blue (turquoise) arches is in Sedona, Arizona, designed that way in the 1990s to blend with the city's red rock landscape and comply with local building codes that protect the area's natural beauty.



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# Trainings, seminars, certifications, activities...

- By: Dr. Margie Sánchez-Vega and Hope Wilson

Here is a list of some courses and activities that might be of interest to you:

- **Basic HACCP training:** This training will be offered in conjunction with Online Initiatives in two separate occasions:
  - May 19-21 (venue TBA)
  - September 15-17 (venue TBA)
- **FSPCA Preventive Controls for Human Foods:** This training will be offered in conjunction with Online Initiatives on June 9-11 (venue TBA).
- **UofA Farm Tour:** board an open-air bus and view current research trials, see harvesting in action and end the tour with a lunch of Yuma's specialty crops. Tickets can be purchased on [eventbrite](#).
  - University of Arizona Yuma Agricultural Center
  - February 10<sup>th</sup>, 9 AM to 12 PM
- **Med Instead of Meds:** Yuma County Cooperative Extension is offering this six-week program designed to improve community health by adopting the Mediterranean lifestyle.
  - Yuma: Contact Maria Doten for more information: [mariadoten@arizona.edu](mailto:mariadoten@arizona.edu)
  - Begins on February 11, 2026
- **Virtual Food Protection Manager Certification Training:** ANAB-accredited training and certification program designed to prepare managers for the FPMC certification exam. Live virtual class via Zoom from 9:00 am - 11:00 am on days 1 and 3. Day 2 is self-guided. Offered by Cooperative Extension in Yavapai and Mohave Counties. Visit the Cooperative Extension events page to [register or for more information](#): Next training is scheduled for February 17 - 19, 2026
- **Community Canning Workshops:** Come learn the basics of how to pressure and water bath can for food preservation purposes. Hands-on activities featuring both water bath and pressure canning. Contact Margine Bawden, [mbawden@arizona.edu](mailto:mbawden@arizona.edu) for questions and to register.
  - Window Rock: February 18<sup>th</sup>, 9 AM to 3 PM
  - Whiteriver: February 19<sup>th</sup>, 9 AM to 3 PM
  - Window Rock: March 12<sup>th</sup>, 9 AM to 3 PM
- **Dehydrating Workshops:** Come learn the basics of traditional dehydrating and new methods of Freeze Drying. Classes will be held at the Holbrook and St. Johns Extension offices. Classes are 3 hours, and will be offered in April, May and June, dates and locations are TBD. Contact Margine Bawden, [mbawden@arizona.edu](mailto:mbawden@arizona.edu) for questions and to register.
- **Apache County 4-H Summer Food Preservation Workshop:** Apache County youth are invited to participate. Workshop will include water bath canning and freeze drying activities. Contact Wendy Wiltbank, [wwiltbank@arizona.edu](mailto:wwiltbank@arizona.edu) at the Apache Extension Office to enroll. Workshops will be held in June and July.

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Today, Extension has offices in all 15 Arizona counties and serves 22 federally recognized tribes, ensuring rural and urban communities have access to trusted, research-based support.



[extension.arizona.edu/local-offices](http://extension.arizona.edu/local-offices)

## Extension presents...

- By: Hope Wilson

The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension advances food safety across Arizona, from production through consumption, by linking applied research with practical, community-based education. Working in partnership with federal agencies, all 15 Arizona counties, and tribal communities, Extension supports residents and professionals on county and tribal lands statewide.

Food safety education is integrated across Extension's three core program areas:

**Agriculture and Natural Resources** supports safe food production through education on crop and livestock systems, water resource management, urban agriculture, and on-farm food safety practices.

**Family, Consumer and Health Sciences** focuses on food safety at the household and retail level, including safe food handling, preservation, nutrition, food access, and chronic disease prevention.

**4-H Youth Development** prepares the next generation of producers, consumers, and leaders via hands-on learning in agriculture, STEM, civic engagement and health.

Tribal Extension or Federally-Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP) connects land-grant institutions, tribal colleges, and community partners. Tribal Extension Agents are embedded within Native American communities, building trust and supporting culturally tailored Extension services that support agriculture, youth, health and economic development.

Together, these efforts make food safety a shared responsibility from field to fork across Arizona.

For this issue's *Extension Presents...*, we highlight the Family, Consumer and Health Sciences (FCHS) program area and its role in food safety beyond the farm. This may include cooking classes, food preservation, retail and consumer food safety, nutrition education, and outreach at farmers markets, food pantries, and other food access points. In Yavapai and Mohave counties, FCHS educators are partnering with the Arizona Department of Health Services to pilot a food safety education program for Arizona Cottage Food Program participants, with plans to refine and expand it statewide.

Cooperative Extension continues to meet renewed interest in home food preservation, offering education on canning, freezing, dehydration, and newer technologies such as home freeze drying. Agents in Apache, Navajo, and Graham counties collaborated with University of Idaho Extension to develop a [four-publication series on freeze drying basics](#). FCHS also supports local food systems through gardens and agriculture partnerships. Pima County Cooperative Extension's the [Garden Kitchen](#) is part of a collaborative supply-chain effort that connects small-scale Arizona growers to new markets. Through funding from the Arizona Department of Agriculture's Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program, they were able to connect Yavapai County producers in the north with the [PLAZA Mobile Market](#) in South Tucson.

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## Member Showcase: Richard Park

- By: Dr. Sadhana Ravishankar



Richard Park is a fourth-year Ph.D. student in the Microbiology program (Ravishankar Lab) at the School of Animal & Comparative Biomedical Sciences (ACBS) at the University of Arizona (UA). Since joining the program in 2022 as a prestigious University Fellow, he has received numerous awards, such as the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Grad Slam First Place, Vic Smith Food Safety Student Poster Award, Food Safety Consortium

Graduate Student Research Scholarship, the Graduate and Professional Student Council Research and Project Grant, and is a recipient of the PANDA Endowment fellowship in Bioinformatics and Molecular Genetics. He has delivered more than 25 research presentations, the most recent at the 2025 ACBS Fall Seminar Series titled, "Perspectives on Produce Safety: Pathogen Prevalence on Melons and Microbiota Shifts in Washed and Unwashed Romaine Lettuce". Richard has been a member of the UA Food Safety Consortium (FSC) since 2018 and has served as the Chair of the Youth Professional Development Subcommittee since 2019. As the Chair, Richard led and coordinated numerous outreach activities at events such as the Cactus-IFT Suppliers' Night for the food industry, and SaferFoodCats, and USDA Ag-Discovery Camps for high school students. Richard also organizes the judging for the FSC sponsored awards (elementary, middle and high school students) for the Southern Arizona Regional Science & Engineering Foundation (SARSEF) Regional Science and Engineering Fair annually and serves as a judge at the Future Farmers of America (FFA) Food Science State Competition for New Food Product Development for high school students annually. Richard also invited speakers to give career talks to students on food safety related careers at the UA FSC Food Safety Conference. In addition, he provides training to undergraduate students in food microbiology laboratory techniques. One notable outreach activity he coordinated was creating food safety videos for an FSC member company to highlight the importance of food safety for World Food Safety Day to their employees (<https://safefood.arizona.edu/news/2024/06/food-safety-videos>).

## Food Science Club

- By: Nguyen Dang

In the semester of Fall 2025, the University of Arizona Food Science Club held three monthly meetings on September 30<sup>th</sup>, October 28<sup>th</sup>, and November 18<sup>th</sup>. We had a lot of fun by making food products as well as making new connections. We were so lucky to have so many members supporting the club!



On October 28<sup>th</sup>, we made some delicious pickles and have each member bring home a jar of pickled cucumber. Thank you to the School of Nutritional Sciences & Wellness for making this meeting possible.

On November 18<sup>th</sup>, we learned how to make kombucha in collaboration with the UA Microbiology Club. A huge shoutout to their club members for an informative night!

The UA Food Science Club is planning for meetings for the Spring 2026 semester. Stay tuned for more updates! Finally, the club would like to extend their appreciation to the club advisors, Professor Sadhana Ravishankar, Ph.D., and Assistant Professor of Practice Yonarki Garcia-Varela, for the continuous support of the club!



## Food Safety Consortium: Website

Want to stay up to date with everything related to the Food Safety Consortium? Scan this QR code and it will take you straight to the website.