

Retail Food Facility Inspection System Survey Results

LOS ANGELES- Since its inception in 1998, significant strides have been made in improving the Restaurant and Food Market Inspection and Grading System (Grading System) within the County of Los Angeles. The Grading System has provided strong industry incentives to raise awareness towards food safety practices and has been successful in improving the inspection scores of retail food establishments. While these improvements are encouraging, studies to measure public opinion regarding these changes had never been conducted.

On March 14, 2000, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors directed the Department of Health Services to conduct a survey of consumers to determine their opinions regarding the Grading System. In the fall of 2001, two thousand Los Angeles County residents were randomly selected and surveyed in both the English and Spanish languages. The results of the surveys are as follows:

Increased Awareness

The survey found that 84% of Los Angeles County residents had heard of the Grading System. Furthermore, three-quarters of the residents identify the Department of Health Services as being the sponsor of the Grading System, making it the most recognized program within the Department of Health Services.

High Popularity

The Grading System is well received among Los Angeles County residents and the overall liking is very high. The survey found the following results:

- 91% of the residents like the Grading System.
- 89% of the residents believe that a good grade helps a food establishment.
- 86% of the residents believe that the Grading System has been effective in improving sanitary conditions in restaurants.
- 77% of residents notice posted grades always or most of the time.

Grading System Influences Behaviors

The survey revealed that Los Angeles County residents have confidence in the Grading System. Sixty-five percent of residents are influenced by letter grades always or most of the time. Residents have also become increasingly selective in their choices of patronage. Of those residents who dine out, only twenty-five percent would eat at “B” restaurant, three percent would eat at “C” restaurants, while eighty-eight percent would only eat at “A” restaurants always or most of the time.

High Internet Usage

Fifty percent of those residents who visit the Department of Health Services website (approximately 380,000 residents) have accessed the site for information on restaurant and food market grades.

Low Awareness in Certain Populations

Awareness regarding the Grading System is lower than average among the following populations:

- Asians
- Latinos

High-Risk Behavior in Certain Populations

Food containing raw or undercooked eggs, raw or undercooked hamburger meat, and raw fish and shellfish can cause food-related illnesses and are considered high-risk foods. The survey indicated that the young (18-29 years) and low income (less than \$30,000 annual household income) residents have a tendency to eat these high-risk foods.

Low Reporting of Illness

Ninety-seven percent of residents who believed that they have experienced gastro-intestinal illnesses due to the consumption of food did not report their illness to the Department of Health Services. Many residents lacked knowledge regarding reporting procedures.

Economic Impact of the Grading System

An independent study conducted by Dr. Phillip Leslie of the Department of Economics at UCLA and Dr. Ginger Jin of the Department of Economics at the University of Maryland regarding disclosure regulations concluded that grading positively influenced restaurant revenue. The study suggests that the mandatory grade posting had caused the overall revenue to increase by approximately three percent. Furthermore, for an “A” restaurant, mandatory grade posting caused the revenue to increase by 5.7 percent.

City Adoption of the Grading System

The following thirteen cities have not adopted the Grading System. These cities account for 7% of the total (36,996) retail food establishment inspection inventory.

Arcadia	La Habra Heights	Sierra Madre
Avalon	Monrovia	Signal Hill
Azusa	Montebello	Torrance
Duarte	Redondo Beach	
City of Industry	San Marino	

* Three additional cities are not included: Bradbury, Hidden Hills, and Rolling Hills, because they are residential cities with no food establishments.