

Food Safety Focus Groups Moderator's Guide

Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to join us today. I am _____ from [name of contractor], a research organization. The purpose of this group is to get your thoughts related to cooking and food. Your feedback is very important to us and may ultimately be used to help improve our communications related to food and cooking habits. Our discussion will last about 90 minutes.

I am an independent consultant hired to moderate these discussions. Therefore, I don't have a vested interest in receiving any particular point of view. I simply want to have an active and lively discussion with all of you. Also, I am not an expert about the topics we are going to discuss today. Therefore, you may have questions that I can't answer.

Have you all had the opportunity to read and sign the informed consent notice?

Ground Rules

- A. You have been asked here to offer your views and opinions; everyone's participation is important
- B. Audio/video/observers
- C. Speak one at a time
- D. No side conversations
- E. No right or wrong answers
- F. It is OK to be critical. If you dislike something or disagree with something that is said, I want to hear about it.
- G. All answers will be kept private to the extent provided by law, so feel free to speak your mind
- H. Please respect one another's confidentiality.

Participant Introductions [5 minutes]

To begin, I would like to have you go around the table and introduce yourselves. Please tell me:

1. Your first name only.
2. Tell me about your favorite food and who or what was influential in teaching you how to cook.

Cooking Skills – Learning how to cook [10 minutes at most. This section should move quickly.]

1. Where have you recently looked for advice about how to cook? (PROBE: Recipes and cooking safely)
2. Have you seen any ads or articles or websites with advice for cooking? Where? What did they tell you? (Probe: recipes and cooking safely)
3. What aspect of cooking or food safety would you like to learn more about?

Food Thermometers and other safe cooking habits [~45 minutes]

1. **Now I would like for you to think about the last time you cooked a meal where you used raw meat or chicken.**
 - a. When was it? What did you make?
 - b. **How did you know when your food was done and ready to eat?**
 - c. *If a food thermometer is mentioned ask:* What temperature did you cook your food to?
2. Has there ever been a time when you were not sure if a food you were making was done? How did you decide?
3. **I want to talk about food thermometers. [Have a couple of people describe what they are. Ask if there are other words to describe a food thermometer, for example “meat thermometer”.]** How is a food thermometer the same or different from other thermometers you have?
4. **Do any/how many of you own food thermometers?** Is there anyone who used to have a food thermometer but does not have one now?
 - a. Probe: **What type of food thermometer do you have?**
5. **In general, when do you use a food thermometer? [Probe: Which type of foods, how often do they use it for those foods (every time, sometimes, only on occasion)]**
6. When did you first start using a food thermometer for those foods? What made you start to use one?
7. Is there anyone who has a food thermometer but never uses it? Tell me about that. Why don't you use it?
8. **What about people who use a food thermometer sometimes. Are there any foods which you can't or don't use a food thermometer for? Which foods? Why don't you use it? (Probe: Hard to use, can't find it, don't want or feel like using it, don't have time)**

9. Does it matter if you are cooking the food in the stove, oven, or microwave? (Ask about each one separately.)
10. **Think about the last time you used a food thermometer. Tell me about your experience using it.**
- When was it? What type of food were you making? Did it help you decide that your food was ready to eat?
 - How did you know what temperature to cook your food to?
 - Was there anything challenging about using the thermometer? [Probe if needed: not sure if it was calibrated correctly, did not know what temperature was “done”, hard to get the thermometer into the food, can’t find it, did not feel like using it]
11. **(As needed) I am going to list a couple of foods that we have not talked about.** For each one, tell me if it is a food that you generally use a food thermometer when cooking, or if it is one that you generally don’t use a food thermometer for. If you don’t use a food thermometer tell me how you know that it is done.
- Roasts**
 - Chicken parts**
 - Hamburgers**
 - Baked egg dishes**
12. **Some of you said that you don’t own a food thermometer. Can you think of some reasons why you don’t own one?** [PROBE: too expensive, never thought to get one, have not gotten around to getting one, no convenient place to get one, can’t find the kind you like, don’t need one, it broke]
- For those who don’t own a food thermometer:* Can you think of anything that would make you want to use a food thermometer? [PROBE: recall notices, hearing of food recalls, cooking for kids or older adults]
13. I have a couple of question about other cooking habits. **Before you begin preparing food, how often do you wash your hands with soap? What about after handling raw meat or chicken, what do you do next?** [Probe: continue cooking, rinse your hands with water, wipe them, wash them with soap]
- How long do you generally wash for? What do you use to dry your hands on?
14. **After you have used a cutting board or other surface for cutting raw meat or chicken, what do you do?** [Probe: use it as is for other food to be eaten raw for the same meal, rinse it, wipe it, wash it with soap]
15. **Have you heard about “rest time” or “resting your meat”?**

- a. What does it mean to “rest” your meat?
- b. What types of meat do you let “rest”?
- c. How many of you let your meat rest before cutting or eating it?
- d. What are the benefits of letting your meat rest?

16. Have you heard of mechanically tenderized beef or steaks? What about needle tenderized beef?

- a. What do those terms mean to you? Where have you heard them before?

17. Have you ever bought beef that was labeled as mechanically tenderized or needle tenderized?

- a. Do you do anything different when preparing mechanically tenderized beef?
- b. Have you heard anything about mechanically tenderized beef being more or less likely to be contaminated with germs such as E. coli? What have you heard?

18. I want to shift focus a bit. How do you know if your refrigerator is cold enough?

- a. **Does your refrigerator have a built-in thermometer?** Tell me about it? Degrees Fahrenheit (or Celsius)? What temperature do you keep your refrigerator set at?
- b. **Have any of you put a thermometer in your refrigerator?** [Probe: What temperature do you try to keep your refrigerator set at? If you don’t have a refrigerator thermometer how do you know if your refrigerator is set to the correct temperature?]

19. Now, think about when you microwave frozen meals

- a. I’m talking specifically about frozen meals that contain meat or poultry -- things like frozen pot pies, pizzas, and single-serving meals containing beef, pork or chicken,
- b. **How do you know when a frozen meal is cooked completely?** (Probe: follow cooking instructions on the package, use thermometer, cooking time, steaming hot?)
- c. **Do you know your microwave’s wattage? Do you know how to find the wattage of your microwave? How?** How does your microwave’s wattage affect how you prepare food? Have you seen information about microwave wattage on the product’s preparation instructions?
- d. **Have you ever seen any frozen foods that say they CAN’T be prepared in the microwave?** What foods were they? How did you cook them?

Fresh Produce and Sprouts [~20 min]

1. Now I want to talk a little about fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - a. **How many of you wash fresh/raw strawberries before eating or serving them? (Show of hands.)** How do you wash them? (Probe: rinse under water, scrub under water, soak in sink/bowl full of water, other) Why do you wash them? (Probe: to remove dirt, to remove pesticides, to remove germs) Do you use any type of cleaner? What type?
 - b. **What about whole cantaloupes? (Show of hands.)** How do you wash them? (Probe: rinse under water, scrub under water, soak in sink/bowl full of water, other) Why do you wash them? (Probe: to remove dirt, to remove pesticides, to remove germs) Do you use any type of cleaner? What type?
 - c. **What about fresh avocados? (Show of hands.)** How do you wash them? (Probe: rinse under water, scrub under water, soak in sink/bowl full of water, other) Why do you wash them? (Probe: to remove dirt, to remove pesticides, to remove germs) Do you use any type of cleaner? What type?
 - d. **What about mangos?** Papayas?
 - e. **What about bagged, pre-cut lettuce? (Show of hands). Does it matter if the lettuce says it has already been prewashed or triple washed?** How do you wash it? (Probe: rinse under water, scrub under water, soak in sink/bowl full of water, other) Why do you wash it? (Probe: to remove dirt, to remove pesticides, to remove germs)
 - f. Are there any fresh fruits and vegetables that we have not talked about that you never wash? Or usually wash?
2. Does it matter if the fruits and vegetables are organic as opposed to conventionally grown? Do you handle organic fruits and vegetables differently than conventionally grown?
3. **Have you heard of any types of fresh fruits or vegetables that are more likely to contain germs and could make you sick?** Which ones?
 - a. Have you heard about any health **risks associated with eating raw sprouts, such as alfalfa or bean sprouts?** What have you heard?
4. Are you ever concerned about the safety of the fresh vegetables and fruit you eat? What are you concerned about?
 - a. Have you taken any steps to address any concerns you have about the safety of fresh vegetables and fruit (steps such as cooking vegetables, avoiding eating item, or buying organic)?

5. Can you think of an occasion where you did not eat or buy a fresh fruit or vegetable because you were concerned about its safety? Tell me about it.

Conclusion – go to the back room and check for any additional questions.

Thank you for your help tonight. [Handout brochure on food safety.]