

## Food allergy policies & procedures in independently-owned restaurants

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## Introduction

- More than 32 million Americans have food allergies (Food Allergy Research & Education [FARE], 2019).
- A food allergy reaction occurs every three minutes in the United States sending an individual to the emergency room (Gupta et al., 2019).
- Consumers are becoming more proactive in expressing their food allergy needs at foodservice establishments (Kwon & Lee, 2012).
- Research studies indicated the need for foodservice operations to implement training and accommodate consumers with food allergies (Lee & Sozen, 2016; Choi & Rajagopal, 2013).

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## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess food allergy policies and procedures in independently-owned restaurants Metro Orlando, Florida.

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## Methodology

### Sampling and Data Collection

- The sample was obtained from a population of owners/managers ( $N = 1,123$ ) of independently-owned restaurants in Metro Orlando, Florida.
- Nine hundred and fifty-seven owners/managers who had a valid phone number were contacted to request participation in this study and obtain an email address where they would prefer to receive the questionnaire.
- Six hundred and one owner/managers provided their email address of which 60 email addresses were undeliverable, making the final sample ( $n = 601$ ).

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## Methodology

### Instrument

- Questionnaire was adapted from a questionnaire developed and validated by Abdelmassih, Rajagopal, & Arendt (2016) and reviewed by experts (n=5).
- The questionnaire was developed in English and then translated into Spanish and finally back translated into English.
- For the pilot study, the questionnaire was sent to 20 Metro Orlando restaurants. Four questionnaires were returned.



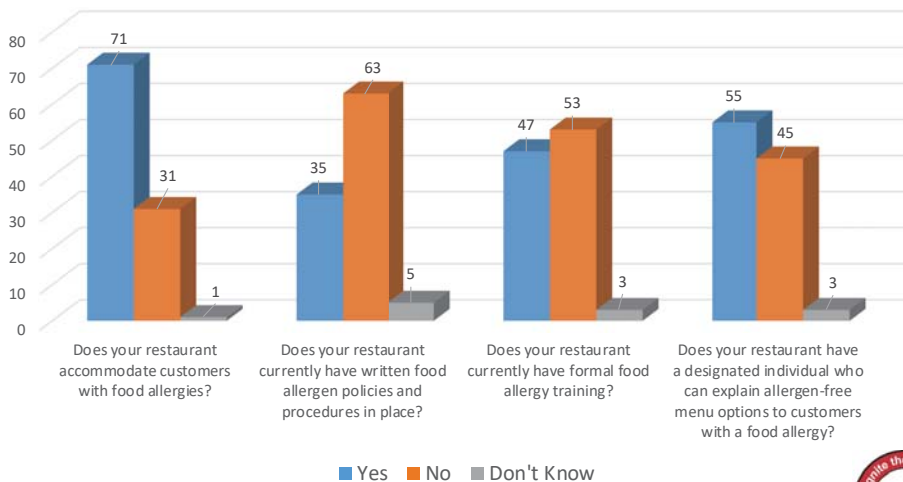
## Methodology

- Results of the pilot study were excluded from the data analysis in the primary research study.
- In addition to the survey questionnaire, participants responded to ten open-ended questions to provide feedback on the clarity of questionnaire instructions and questions, organization of the questionnaire, and distribution process.
- Data was collected using Qualtrics® and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (version 27.0).

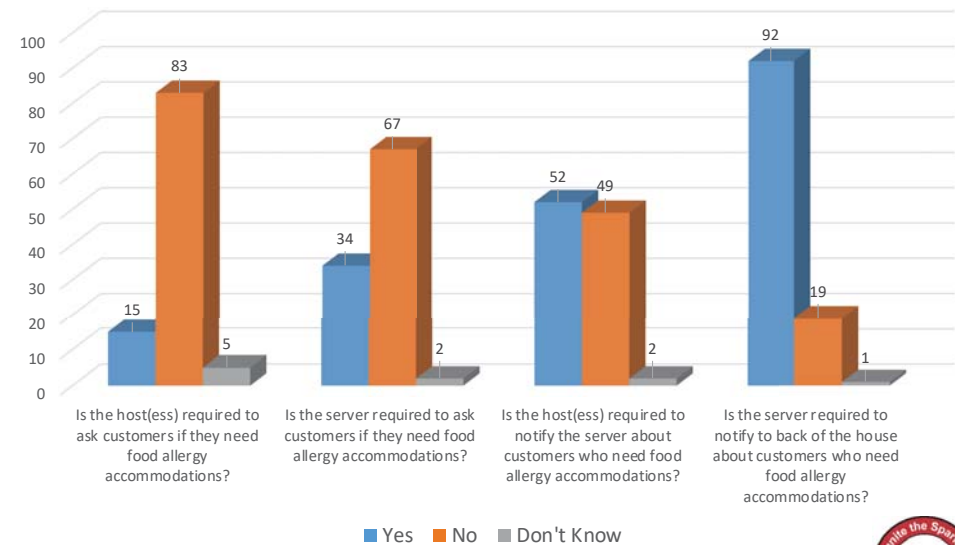


## Results

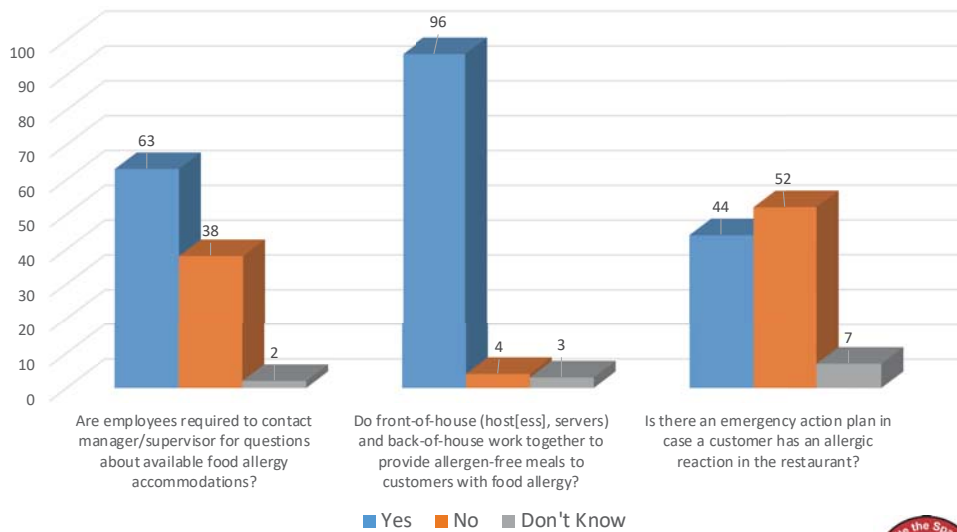
- Total of 111 questionnaires were returned and 103 (92.8%) were usable.



## Results



## Results



## Results

- Forty percent (n = 41) had allergen-free menu options.
- Food allergy training was available in English (n = 27, 26.2%), while 20 participants (19.4%) indicated training was also available in Spanish.
- Over half of the participants (n = 59, 53.2%) were unaware of the State of Florida's requirement for all restaurants managers and employees to know the most common food allergens.



## Conclusions

- The study found that a number of foodservice operations had no written food allergy policies and procedures even though they accommodate consumers with a food allergy.
- Communication between server and back-of-house (kitchen staff) existed when addressing consumers who need food allergy accommodations.
- Training was mainly available in English, and not available in multiple languages.



## Future Directions

- Future research could compare employees and managers/owners' food allergy attitudes and knowledge to identify potential gaps.
- Observational studies could be conducted to assess "real-time" food allergy practices of employees.
- Socioeconomic influences on food allergy attitudes and practices could be examined to assess differences that might influence food allergy attitudes and practices.



## Limitations

- The COVID-19 pandemic made contacting participants quite challenging as restaurants possibly remained closed or were operating for limited hours.
- The COVID-19 pandemic may have also influenced participant willingness be a part of a research study.
- Participant phone numbers and email addresses were not always accurate.
- The low questionnaire response rates limits the generalizability of the findings.



Thank you

