With the recent scares of E. coli in Germany and Salmonella in tomatoes from a Florida-based company, consumers are placing food safety at the forefront of their minds. To help prevent foodborne illnesses, more consumers are taking a personal initiative to ensure that their food is safe. As food service professionals, we must practice food safety techniques in our daily tasks and set the bar high for others in the industry. Here are some important things to remember to help keep your food safe and your customers smiling.

When receiving, preparing, storing, and serving food to consumers, **temperature plays an important role** each step of the way. It is especially important to play close attention to food temperatures when working with foods such as meat, poultry, seafood, and dairy products, all which favor bacterial growth.

The growth of bacteria is most prevalent when foods are held at temperatures within the *danger zone of 41°F to 140°F*. Food should not be held within this temperature range for more than a total of four hours. When receiving food at your establishment, make sure that refrigerated goods are 41°F or below and that frozen goods are 0°F or below. It is imperative that food is received within these safe temperatures to ensure food safety from start to finish. To guarantee safe internal temperatures when cooking food, a digital, dial, or infrared thermometer is a necessity.

You can also put temperature concerns aside with the proper equipment. Equipment with multi-temperature compatibilities is helping to improve food safety. With the ability to keep both hot and cold food safe in one accessible and easy-to-use unit, food service operators can efficiently store and deliver meals without the temperature worry. With multi-temp serving equipment and even multi-temperature systems to divide truck trailers for transport, food safety can take a step in the right direction.

It is also essential to practice **safe preparation techniques** that prevent cross-contamination. Make sure to wash your hands, surfaces, and utensils often to help prevent bacteria from spreading. Whether at home or in a commercial kitchen, always thoroughly rinse your fruits and vegetables *before* you begin to cut- a step that must never be skipped. In addition, use one cutting boards for produce and another for raw meat, poultry, and produce. Not only is it important to combat cross-contamination so bacteria doesn't spread, but different preparation areas and techniques are also essential when preparing food for gluten-free and allergy-concerned guests. Ensure all aspects of food safety in your kitchen and take measures to prevent cross-contamination.

How are you improving food safety in your kitchen? Which educational opportunities are you providing to your staff?