

ABSTRACT

An Evaluation of The Ministry Of Health's New Food Establishment Licensing Programme In St. Thomas

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The Ministry of Health promulgated the Food Establishment Licensing Programme Regulation, 1998 and its amended version in 2000. This move was designed to improve standards and promote food safety by ensuring that all food-handling establishments are licensed to operate.

This study was conducted in St. Thomas during the period January – March 2002. St Thomas was the scene of one of the largest foodborne disease outbreaks in the country in 1976 with 17 reported deaths.

Cluster, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were utilized to select 30% of food handling establishments in Zones 1 and 2 of the parish. A questionnaire was administered to respondents at these establishments. The study found a 57% compliance rate with the licensing programme.

Results also showed that knowledge of the application procedure for a license was significantly associated with whether or not food-handling establishments were licensed ($p < 0.05$). Operators who know about the procedure for applying for a licence were more likely to have their establishments licensed than those who did not know about the procedure.

Knowledge of the penalty for non-compliance with the licensing programme was also significantly associated with whether or not establishments were licensed. Operators of unlicensed establishments cited the lack of money to pay the licensing fee and their inability to meet the public health requirements as the main reasons preventing them from obtaining a licence.

In general, operators of food handling establishment were supportive of the new programme, seeing it as better than the previous one that did not require a licence. Sensitizing their customers to the public health need for standards and licensing might most successfully persuade operators of food handling establishments.

Keywords: Pauline Bryan-Ellington; Food establishment licensing; Issues affecting compliance.