

# (DRAFT UPDATED 4/5)

## **Delegated Agency Environmental Specialist Experience - Lauri Clements - Olmsted County Public Health**

### **Summary:**

- Olmsted County Public Health Services (OCPHS) is a delegated agency of the Minnesota Department of Health; its public health regulatory authority includes both food businesses and drinking water.
- Food entrepreneurs who complete business plan research (overall goals, menu offering, idea of cost and time constraints, etc.) before contacting their inspector tend to be more successful in navigating the regulatory system.
- Entrepreneurs who have food service backgrounds often have a better idea of the issues for which they'll need to plan; those who don't have this experience can benefit by working with a mentor in food business who can often help them avoid unnecessary mistakes.
- OCPHS is responsible for regulating about 600 licensed food establishments, and about 400 pools, lodging, manufactured home parks, and campground establishments.
- Because OCPHS inspectors are managing establishments just within their own county, resulting in minimal drive time, they are able to spend more time with operators and consult each establishment thoroughly.

### **Day-To-Day Job Experiences**

As an Environmental Specialist for Olmsted County Public Health Services (OCPHS), Lauri Clements is one of seven inspectors who works with and inspects licensed facilities and special events, regulates drinking water quality, and manages a portfolio of broader related work. One current example of this broader work involves coordinating a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) grant focused on improving industry relationships and outreach.

The Environmental Health Division of Olmsted County's Public Health Services provides a public health focus on all aspects of environmental health, not just on inspection for safe food handling practices. Given this broader focus, Clements's work involves interacting with others both within and outside of OCPHS. For example, she helps inform food safety components of SHIP projects being led by health educators in the topic areas of farm-to-school and school garden creation. Clements also spends time bringing her expertise to advisory committees such as the Local Food Advisory Committee.

Another outcome of the OCPHS broader public health focus is that inspectors provide additional consultation time with the food businesses they serve. Since OCPHS is a delegated agency, inspectors follow the same statutes and codes as MDH. To improve the consultation and regulatory processes, OCPHS encourages feedback from operators, and these operators have reported that they value the consultative/educational approach and benefit from additional consultation time.

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### **Interactions with Establishments & Small Business Owners**

One of Clements's most rewarding experiences occurred when she helped a school incorporate local meat products and fresh produce into their menu. She worked to identify a safe food source with the school and together they created a publication that highlights steps for other school food staff to identify safe local food sources in their areas as well. By having a broad focus on public health as well as food safety, Clements helped the school accomplish its goal of giving kids a healthier, local selection of food while still ensuring food safety.

### **Factors That Make the Inspection Process Easier/Harder**

From Clements's experience, it is important for food entrepreneurs to have done their research and have a clear idea of business intent, a menu offering, a concept of cost and time constraints, and to engage with the regulatory agency and business plan development system right away after that research has been done. Starting the plan review process early helps to move the process along more quickly. It is also very helpful if the entrepreneur has a food service background since they often have a better idea of the issues for which they'll need to plan. Entrepreneurs who don't have this experience can benefit by working with a mentor in food business who can often help them avoid unnecessary mistakes.

In Olmsted County, OCPHS is responsible for regulating approximately 600 licensed food establishments (20% of which are temporary, seasonal, or mobile), and about 400 pools, lodging, manufactured home parks (MHPs), and campground establishments. OCPHS uses a point system that more heavily weighs the higher risk establishments. Although they inspect every food business once per year, more time is spent at higher risk facilities. This means many businesses are inspected more frequently than the frequency outlined in Statute 157 for non-delegated authority MDH inspections. Despite the high number of establishments to inspect, OCPHS inspectors are able to regulate and consult with each establishment and conduct their responsibilities efficiently; because they are managing just establishments within their own county, resulting in minimal drive time and allowing for the additional time spent with operators.

Inspectors in Olmsted County have to go through continued education classes to maintain their credentials. Clements views this as a positive for the program since training and networking helps inspectors consistently improve their practices and learn new information needed in their field.

### **Tools/Resources that She Provides to Small Business Owners**

OCPHS offers on-site consultation for entrepreneurs prior to plan review & licensing and provides anecdotal information about what successful practices the inspectors themselves have encountered before. Consultation for these small business owners is a requirement for Olmsted County inspectors, and the sooner the small business owner engages with his or her inspector, the better the experience usually is. Additionally, OCPHS works with large special events to

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ensure all environmental health standards are in place, whether it be working with the event organizer to hook up with water, electricity, hand washing stations, or trash. OCPHS takes a systematic approach to public health, and their organizational structure and operational processes allows them to understand each business with as much detail as possible.