



## Sanitation Programs Pay

### *Who Says?*

Robbins and McSwane published the article '*Sanitation Doesn't Cost, it Pays: Is it true and can we prove it?*' in the December (1994) issue of the Journal of Environmental Health. They studied the actual measurable savings to a meat department located in a medium sized chain retail store. The savings do not include those associated with reduced potential incidents of foodborne illness.

### *What Was Studied?*

Robbins and McSwane collected data during pre-base line, base line, training and post training periods at the meat department. The data included equipment swabs, product and room temperatures, sanitation costs, rewrap costs, product volumes and prices, product shelf life and colour, and customer complaints. The data was finally tabulated to summarize the benefits of an improved sanitation program.

### *What Were the Results?*

Robbins and McSwane demonstrated that the improved sanitation program reduced the number of bacteria in the ground beef and on the equipment. They further showed that the increased cleaning costs were recouped by reduced reprocess and reprocessing labour costs. This benefit was demonstrable despite a change in management during the training period, which may have contributed to an increase in reprocess and discard losses in the post-training period.

### *How Much Was Saved?*

Reprocess losses were cut by 30.6% despite the increase in discarded and reprocessed items. This represented an annual savings of \$5,263.30. Savings would have been higher had a meat cutters wage not been used to calculate the labour portion of cleaning costs.

### *How Can this Help the EHO?*

Often the Environmental Health Officer is viewed as presenting 'ivory tower' information that has little bearing in reality other than to increase operation costs. This information may assist you in convincing an establishment that sanitation costs can be recouped through improved product quality.

### *Important Assumptions Which Were Confirmed/Dispelled*

1. Despite knowledge of basic sanitation principles, observations of on-the-job performance showed that this knowledge was not always incorporated in the food handling practices.
2. The supervisor was unaware that food safety standards required that equipment be cleaned daily. The mixer-grinder was scheduled for cleaning once weekly.
3. Many employees did not read the 'manual' during the training period due to 'a lack of time'.
4. Practices resulting in immediate or obvious improvements were most easily accepted and incorporated into daily activities.

Those procedures with less visible benefits, such as proper thawing procedures, met more resistance.