Staff Profile: Marissa Mills
I was born in Southern California, but have called Denver home for over half of my life. While not a native myself, I am the daughter and granddaughter of Colorado natives! I earned my bachelor’s degree in psychology and history from the University of Colorado, Boulder. While in school I had the opportunity to study abroad in southern England. After returning home, I worked in administrative support in the property management industry and took classes in film and creative writing at the University of Colorado, Denver.

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The Journal is always looking for your feedback! We want to know what you like (or don’t like) about each issue, and letters to the editor are always welcomed. Submit any feedback to jeh@neha.org.

Letters to the Editor
Dear Editor:
In the December 2013 issue of the Journal of Environmental Health (76(5)), the article entitled, “State Health Agency Workforce Shortages and Implications for Public Health: A Case Study of Restaurant Inspections in Louisiana,” aimed to evaluate how workforce shortages within a state public health department affect the ability of environmental health regulatory staff to perform routine food safety inspections and ensure the safety of the food supply. A minor but critical error was in the Introduction where I write, “The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that to sustain an effective risk-based food safety program, state agencies should maintain well-resourced programs; i.e., at least one-full time staff member devoted to every 280–320 food establishments (FDA, 2009).”

I was contacted by a NEHA member about the accuracy of this statement and the sentence should have correctly read, “The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that to sustain an effective risk-based food safety program, state agencies should maintain well-resourced programs; i.e., at least one-full time staff member devoted to every 280–320 food safety inspections performed annually (FDA, 2009).”

The change in wording from the FDA recommendation does not detract, however, from the intention of the comparison made within the article. In fact, it reinforces and strengthens the findings. As stated in the article, in 2010, seven total environmental health sanitarians in East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, were responsible for inspecting 2,775 food establishments annually; creating a ratio of 396 food establishments to be inspected per sanitarian. Assuming that a sanitarian inspected each food establishment as least once per year (even though higher-risk category establishments should be inspected more than once per year), they would far exceed the FDA recommendation of 280–320 food safety inspections performed annually. Realistically, however, the minimum required 396 annual food establishment inspections do not take into account reinspections, complaint-based inspections, outbreak investigations, and other inspection duties as required by environmental health regulations. Thus, the true number of inspections that East Baton Rouge sanitarians are expected to perform annually is probably closer to double the recommended amount.

Based on the findings from this article and in the opinion of the author, it is important that state and local health department budgets are protected and maintained at a level where routine food establishment inspections can be performed according to FDA recommendations to ensure the safety of our food and to protect the public’s health.

Lindsey Realmuto, MPH
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