

USDA Food Safety Mobile 2004 U.S. Tour



The USDA Food Safety Mobile was busy again in 2004, bringing food safety education to consumers at 100 events in 76 cities. The Mobile, operated by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), reached 48 States and the District of Columbia by the end of this, its second, annual U.S. tour.



Since March 2003, the USDA Food Safety Mobile has been finding consumers where they already go—fairs, festivals, schools, senior centers, grocery stores, parades, and more. FSIS and its partners take food safety information, materials, and experts directly to consumers without waiting for them to come looking and asking for them. These are often people who would normally not reach out themselves for information on

safe food handling, but are eager to keep themselves and their families safe.

Covered with colorful graphics featuring the notorious BAC!—the foodborne bacteria that can make people sick—the Mobile is a traveling educational tool in and of itself. Among the U.S. landmarks depicted on the Mobile's exterior lurk these

bacteria characters, stirring up trouble with food. The four steps to keeping food safe—Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill—are displayed as characters like Thermi™.

FSIS manages the Mobile and local educators host events. FSIS and local educators staff events and answer consumers' questions. The Mobile is stocked with materials consumers can take home as reminders and totes food-safety fun. The costumed-

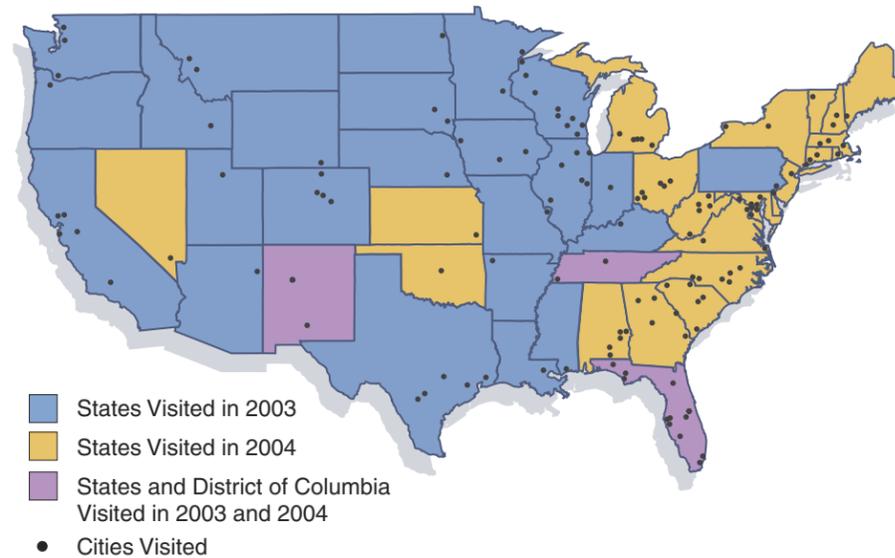
characters Thermo™ and BAC! tour with the Mobile. The food safety wheel game attracts adults and children alike, beckoning them to spin the wheel, answer a question, and win a prize. Everyone walks away with a free promotional piece such as a magnet, sticker, temporary tattoo, refrigerator thermometer, or sometimes even a food thermometer. Interacting with consumers is the key to establishing a lasting impression—and affecting consumer behavior.

In 2004, the Food Safety Mobile traveled 21,000 miles, taking safe food-handling messages to communities across the Nation.

Events this year included:

- Three Kings Day Parade in Miami, FL;
- Atlanta, GA, Community Food Bank Walk for Hunger;
- Mercer County, WV, Kiddie Fair;
- Taste of Cincinnati, OH;
- National Capital BBQ Battle in Washington, DC;
- Great Lakes Folk Festival in Lansing, MI;

2003–2004 USDA Food Safety Mobile Visits



- Hopkinton, NH, State Fair;
- Albuquerque, NM, International Balloon Fiesta;
- AARP convention in Las Vegas, NV; and
- Thanksgiving Parade in Baltimore, MD.

A primary goal of the USDA Food Safety Mobile is to establish and develop partnerships with various local educators and others interested in food safety in their communities. USDA and FSIS have a long history with many organizations interested in food safety. The value added by these new and growing partnerships is enormous. The Mobile would not be successful without them.

By December 2004, FSIS had more than 1,100 Food Safety Mobile partners in its database. These partners come from a variety of organizations:

- Universities and cooperative extension;
- State and local public health, agriculture, and other government agencies; and
- Grocery stores, schools; and many others.

FSIS also partnered with several universities to start an internship program. Undergraduate and

graduate students worked at events on the road and at headquarters assisting with logistics. Most interns received college credit or community service hours for their degree or an accreditation. All gained valuable experience in public health education.

By using innovative approaches to reach consumers, FSIS puts itself in a unique position: using marketing innovations to reach audiences never before reached and “selling” behaviors beneficial to public health. With this approach, FSIS has provided to the public more than 800,000 face-to-face experiences with food safety messages.

Along with the experiential marketing benefits, the Mobile also contributes to educating consumers through the basic food safety messages it displays and the widespread local media attention it garners. This local media attention has resulted in safe food-handling messages reaching millions of consumers. FSIS estimates that in the Mobile's first 2 years, it garnered more than 99 million media impressions.

In 2004, FSIS commissioned focus group research to attain a better understanding of how the Mobile program affected consumers and how



it could be enhanced. Researchers interviewed 61 participants who had visited the Mobile in 2004. Most participants said their visit to the Mobile increased or reinforced their awareness of safe food-handling practices. Surveys of the participants before and after visits showed that more participants reported an increase in their awareness or practice of safe food-handling if they received a useful promotional item, such as a T-stick, refrigerator thermometer, or magnet listing the proper internal temperatures.

Participants also reported that the most useful sources of information at the Mobile were the FSIS and local educators with whom they personally spoke about their concerns or questions. The educational service to the community by the Mobile program and local educators was also appreciated by participants.

Another favorite of the participants and their children was the food safety wheel game. They said they liked that it was interactive, engaging, and educational. It left them “hungry” for more! •



Food Safety Mobile Statistics

| | 2003 | 2004 | Total |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| States (including DC) | 28 | 25 | 49 |
| Cities | 64 | 76 | 136 |
| Events | 87 | 100 | 187 |
| Miles Traveled | 23,833 | 21,142 | 44,975 |
| Estimated Face-to-Face Contacts | 179,000 | 658,001 | 873,001 |
| Materials Distributed | 278,132 | 387,054 | 665,186 |
| Potential Media Impressions | 64,439,050 | 35,207,054 | 99,646,357 |

So Who Gets to Drive this Thing?

On the Road With Tim Leonard and the USDA Food Safety Mobile

By Dianne Durant

“24/7.” You hear it so much, it starts to lose meaning—but not for Tim Leonard. He’s been on the road with the USDA Food Safety Mobile, taking it and its messages about safe food handling to communities across America.

Leonard and the Mobile have covered nearly 45,000 miles and traveled to events in each of the contiguous 48 States and the District of Columbia. Leonard is driver, valet, coordinator, foreman, inventory manager, custodian, superintendent, maintenance, host, public relations representative, educator, and tour guide.

It was by chance that Leonard became the face of USDA on the road. But when you understand the roads that led Leonard to this job, you also begin to understand why he is so very good at what he does.

Leonard was raised on a poultry farm in southern California, 1 of 10 children. After community college, he headed for India with the Peace Corps. By the time he returned, Leonard was so immersed in the country, he was dreaming in the language. And, the Peace Corps project—teaching and promoting egg production—was so successful that India became a leading producer of eggs.

Back in the States, his path took him back to college—and part-time work as a meat inspector. That, in turn, led to a 35-year career with the Federal Government. For many of those years, Leonard managed personnel offices for FSIS.

But even during this career, there was a passion for the road. Enter the Harley. Leonard’s Harley-Davidson motorcycle, he’ll admit, is one of the things he truly misses when he’s traveling.



Mobile driver Tim Leonard prepares to host the food safety wheel game at a State fair.

Leonard didn't seek to become an on-the-road guide to food safety. He had been retired several years when a colleague mentioned the new project. “I decided to go for it,” he says. And within 3 weeks, Leonard launched a new life, traveling America and helping teach food safety.

“I think it’s really made a difference,” Leonard says. People are always enthusiastic about the Mobile and support the educational effort. “Fully 90 percent of the people—and I’m talking about thousands of people—will say: ‘This is the Department of Agriculture, right? Our taxes are paying for this, right?’ I’ll say, ‘They sure do.’ And people respond, ‘Well, I agree with this. This is a great idea. Food safety is important.’”

Wherever they go, Leonard and the Mobile are emissaries. “You drive down the road and people wave at you and smile, constantly. Almost

every place you stop—filling up at a gas station, getting some food, pulling into a motel—people will come up to you and start talking. ‘What do you do? How long have you been on the road? How many places have you been?’ It’s exciting to be able to meet all these people.”

On one occasion, motoring in a parade through the Navajo Nation Fair, the crowd catching sight of the Mobile even sent up a chant: U-S-D-A! U-S-D-A!

“We are very, very well received and it makes me feel like we’re making a contribution to these communities,” Leonard says.

But there is more to the Mobile than educating consumers, Leonard notes. “When you are out there on the road, you see the impact of the partnerships we make at these events. It’s just incredible. USDA, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, public health, and extension—we’re working together. We help them realize we are all on the same team. With the Mobile, we bring resources they just can’t produce. And they bring local contacts; getting word to people we could never reach. It really works.

“But the other interesting thing is that we are a catalyst. We bring people together who’ve never worked together before. And now they are. Long after we are gone, this is something that remains,” Leonard says.

So, after all these miles, do those days on the road all become a daze?

“When I left with the Mobile for the first time, it was April 1, 2003. And when I came back after that first tour, it was exactly December 1. And, in my mind, I still had a clear picture of every event that took place. That’s how memorable it was.” •