



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Grocers and government simulate food attack response

East Lansing, Mich. (May 25, 2004)— How would grocers, emergency response leaders and government officials react if food purchased in Michigan grocery stores was purposely contaminated and making people sick? That was the question posed on Friday at Michigan State University during an interactive food security reality check.

In the first interactive event of its kind in the nation, more than 125 grocer executives worked with Michigan emergency response leaders and local, state and federal government officials to test their food security plans and procedures in case of an intentional food contamination at a grocery store. The results: Face-to-face communication between industry and government to find ways to improve food security measures and response.

Ed Mather, deputy director of the National Food Safety & Toxicology Center at Michigan State University, helped sponsor and organize the exercise after participating in a similar event in Maryland several months ago with the National Restaurant Association there. Mather is the MSU lead on a new Department of Homeland Security Center for Food Security.

“One of the most important aspects of food security prevention and protection – whether for industry, government or academia – is education. That’s one of the goals of the new DHS center, and one of the main goals of the National Food Safety & Toxicology Center,” Mather says.

The one-day exercise, conducted on May 21 at the MSU Kellogg Center, helped reveal some misconceptions about government and industry procedures, Mather says. It also provided grocers and those in the food industry with ideas on improved response and recovery during a food safety or terrorist situation.

The Michigan Grocers Association was a key sponsor and organizer of the exercise. Linda Gobler, president of the grocers organization, looks forward to sharing the information gleaned from this event with other grocers around the country.

“In the post-September 11 world, the food industry is now on the front lines of the war on terrorism,” says Gobler. “This one-day exercise has already improved communications and relations 100 percent.”

Agencies from the State of Michigan were also key sponsors of the event. The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Michigan Department of Community Health, along with Michigan State Police, actively participated and demonstrated how Michigan’s system is unique, says Dan Wyant, director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

“Cross-agency and organization partnerships and activities like this are instrumental in further enhancing the state’s efforts to ensure safe and secure food supply,” Wyant said. “In fact, because of this cooperative approach, Michigan is truly emerging as a national leader in proactively working to address and prevent potential threats to our food and agricultural infrastructure.”

Tabletop Exercise sponsors included the Food and Agriculture Information Sharing and Analysis Center, Food Marketing Institute, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan Department of Community Health, Michigan Grocers Association, Michigan State Police, Michigan State University, National Restaurant Association, United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association and the Uriah Group.

The National Food Safety & Toxicology Center ([www.foodsafe.msu.edu](http://www.foodsafe.msu.edu)) at Michigan State University is committed to reducing food-related disease on a global level, through research, education and service.

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