

# Food & Ag Lab is Open for Business!

New information about the Austin, Texas based lab



## Our Founder

Darren Toczko moved to Austin with his wife, son and daughter after being recruited by a local food company to head up their Food Safety & Quality department. When he moved to Austin, he discovered that central Texas didn't have any local food labs, so he established Food & Ag Lab to meet the testing needs of the area. The lab is in the old Highland Mall in the [ACC Bioscience incubator](#) and includes around \$1.2 million of lab equipment in it's 10,000 square foot space. Darren has two decades of experience in QA, Food Safety, and lab operations, including holding Director & VP positions. He served on IAFP's food sanitation and hygiene professional development group for several years, and AMI's scientific affairs and inspection committee. He has dealt with GFSI certifications, USDA, FDA food recalls, accreditations, imports, and exports. He holds a master's in agricultural food and life sciences and a BS in Biology.

## Current Promotion

*Listeria* spp. environmentals  
\$15 per test June 23-30<sup>th</sup>,  
AOAC-RI 020401. Contact  
us for details.



## This Issue

Our Founder

Shelf Life Studies

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Current Promotion

## Current projects

There are currently five shelf life studies underway for refrigerated food products. This involves measuring down to the microscopic level the rate and type of spoilage. This type of information can reduce food waste since it helps food companies determine how long they have between the time of production and food spoilage. This is then used to calculate a best-before dating to let the consumers know when the peak quality has passed. Companies often use these dates for traceability purposes. The five shelf life studies currently underway are all from local Austin based companies.

The Food & Ag Lab is also helping local companies make sure the food packaging environment is clean. One way companies do this is to sample with a special swab sampling device that looks like a sponge on a stick. The lab can analyze this to look for any target suspect bacteria that may have come in with raw materials and ended up on the floor or drains. Alerting companies when there is a potential issue allows them to respond and assure that hygienic standards remain intact so only safe, wholesome food products go to their customers.

## Putting the lab to the test:

How do we know that a lab and the methods they use can produce accurate results? Proficiency testing!

Proficiency testing programs are part of a lab's quality system. This involves the lab receiving samples from a proficiency testing provider. Our lab utilizes the American Proficiency Institute and analyzes unknown samples for the presence of targets such as *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, or *E. Coli* O157. The lab reports it's results back to the proficiency testing provider and later the provider lets the lab know how their results compared to the many other labs that received replicates of the same samples.

### Consulting:

Recently we were called in to help troubleshoot with a client that had recently been dealing with a persistent *Listeria* issue. We were able to give a fresh perspective, feedback, and some practical steps the facility could take to reduce risk.

