

Hello, and welcome to Essentials of Food Safety for Farmworkers, a training series brought to you by the CCE Cornell Vegetable Program. Every produce farm should implement food safety practices to ensure that produce is safe for consumers. This series will cover how to create a worker training program, foodborne pathogens of concern, routes of contamination, principles of health and hygiene, risk assessment, and so much more.

This training aims to cover many of the required worker training topics set forth by FSMA (the Food Safety Modernization Act), or other 3rd party auditing programs. This training series primarily focuses on training farmworkers in the produce industry. Because Food Safety is a company-wide responsibility, we invite all farm employees to participate in this training.

Let's Begin. Part 1: Creating a Worker Training Program

The Objectives for Part 1 include:

- Highlight the importance of training farmworkers
- Identify topics that farmworkers should be trained on
- Share considerations for training farmworkers
- Understand the role of the food safety manager
- Introduce resources available to managers to assist in training

Let's discuss why farmworkers should be trained.

- Fresh fruits and vegetables often receive no additional processing (such as cooking) before being eaten. Workers can introduce contamination while handling produce or touching food contact surfaces. Workers may be the last people that have touched produce prior to it being consumed.
- Workers who are sick or do not keep up with personal hygiene have contributed to outbreaks of food poisoning and illnesses in the past.
- Training can help to reduce the chances of your workers contaminating produce with foodborne pathogens or other types of contamination.

Who should receive training?

Food Safety is a company-wide responsibility. All employees should receive training and understand the role they play in ensuring food safety practices and policies are carried out. Includes full-time, permanent, temporary, part-time, seasonal, contracted, and all other relevant personnel

This would also include volunteers, such as CSA members that are required to help out on the farm as part of their CSA membership, gleaning crews, volunteers from churches, school groups, and so on. Family Members should also be trained. Family members can sometimes be the hardest employees to train, especially if your farm is multigenerational, in transition from one generation to another. Interns – paid or unpaid should be trained as well.

All farm owners, and anyone in a managerial or supervisory role should be trained as well in order to set a good example for all farm employees.

Workers should be trained...

- If they harvest produce, sort, grade, wash or pack produce, handle food contact surfaces (such as harvest bins, tools, packing equipment, or any other surface that may come into contact with food.

- If workers are responsible for cleaning or maintain harvesting, packing, or washing equipment they should also be trained.
- If they work in receiving of shipping or supervise ANY of these activities they should be trained on food safety.
- If you have workers that are primarily assigned to empty trash cans or cull bins, sweep or clean floors, maintain restrooms, maintain non-food contact surfaces, conduct pest control, or operative forklifts of tractors, and they ALSO handle produce, even infrequently, they should trained.

Worker training should cover the following topics:

- Sources and routes of contamination
- How to identify and reduce food safety risks
- Preventative and corrective measures that workers should take to reduce food safety risks
- Who to tell if workers see a food safety risk they cannot take care of
- How to recognize if they are sick and the importance of personal hygiene for all workers and visitors
- Other training relevant to the worker's job
- Your farm's food safety procedures

If employees harvest produce, they should be trained on a few additional topics including:

- How to recognize when produce should not be harvested. This includes knowing signs of animal contamination including feces, animal tracks, rooting, or feeding. Additionally, workers should be trained not to harvest dropped produce.
- If workers find that produce is contaminated they should know what to do with the contamination, and how to determine which crops can be harvested.
- They should understand how they can contaminate crops during harvest.
- They should also know how to inspect harvest containers and equipment for contamination and how to correct problems with harvest containers or equipment
- Who to report problems to

How often should training occur?

- Upon hiring so that workers know right from the beginning what is expected of them.
- Seasonally – if farm tasks change throughout the year or if different crews work on the farm at different times of the year.
- At least once annually
- When a problem arises
- When a change is made to your food safety practices

So, how can you begin to develop a worker training program? Step 1 – Identify a Farm Food Safety Manager.

Every farm should have someone in charge of Food Safety on the farm. This person should have food safety training and experience. They should be knowledgeable about the farm, the crops that are grown, how they are grown, etc so they can help guide Food safety practices and Standard operating procedures.

- This person should help to create the Farm's Food Safety Plan.
- They should make sure the Food Safety Plan is being followed.
- They should also feel comfortable interacting with FSMA Inspectors or other 3rd party auditors as well as anyone else that may have questions about the Farm's food safety policies.

- And finally, this person should also feel comfortable training or assisting in training farmworkers and other employees.

Step 2: Develop a Farm Food Safety Plan

The Food Safety Plan includes documents like risk assessments, farm policies, training records, farm maps, important contact information for service providers or buyers, standard operating procedures, water testing results, and so on. It's your one stop shop for everything related to Food Safety on the farm.

This document is a living document. That means that when you change farm policies or practices, add additional fields or farm sites, change vendors or buyers, etc., that your food safety plan should change as well.

A Farm Food Safety Plan is not required by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), but it is often a requirement for 3rd party audit programs such as GAPS or HGAPs.

Step 3: Train Personnel

Set aside time **BEFORE** the season begins to train farm workers and other employees.

Use SOPs (Standard operating procedures) to define how workers should complete specific food safety practices. Anyone should be able to follow an SOP and carry out the task – even if they've never done it before. Consider language barriers – if your workers' native language is Spanish, Somali, Arabic, English, etc. They need to be trained in that language so that they can fully understand what is being asked of them. And be aware that even if workers can speak and understand a language, they may not be able to read in that language.

Cultural differences can also cause misunderstandings. For example, in some countries, the plumbing infrastructure is such that you are taught to throw toilet paper away in the trash can and not in the toilet. Be very clear in your instructions what your expectations are for your farm – toilet paper should always be thrown in the toilet and **not** in the trash can.

Everyone learns at a different pace and in a different way. Some people are visual learners, while others prefer hands on activities. Use posters, signs, games, hands on demonstrations, and videos to enhance your trainings.

Step 4 – Document Worker Trainings

After you conduct a worker training, record the date the training was held, the name of the trainer, information or topics that were covered, printed names and signatures of attendees, and the manager's signature. These records can go in your Farm Food Safety Plan and easily be reference if Inspectors or Auditors request to see them. There are many training template logs that already exist – before creating your own logs, do a quick search or contact your local Extension Educator to find those resources and save yourself some time.

Step 5 – Develop a monitoring program.

Now that you've trained your employees, it's time to make sure they're following your farms food safety practices and policies. This might look like regularly checking monitoring logs to verify they are being initialed and dated, assigning an employee to check bathroom facilities each day to determine if supplies need to be restocked. Or you may decide to ask your farm supervisors to observe worker's behavior – are they following your policies? Coming to work sick? Washing their hands after using the restroom, and so on.

Step 6: Reinforce Training

Many food safety policies and practices are centered on establishing good habits or breaking bad ones. This can be hard to do. It may be necessary to reinforce trainings throughout the year. Consider posting visual aids, like posters, with reminders to workers to wash their hands, what symptoms of illnesses look like, what to do about injuries. Place these signs in areas that make sense – next to first aid kits, in the break room, in restrooms.

Conduct refresher trainings throughout the season. If you find that most of your employees are not following farm policies, perhaps they didn't understand the expectations. Maybe you should try training them a different way. If only one employee is having issues with following farm policies, you may be able to have an one-on-one discussion and training with that employee.

You might also consider providing incentives for employees that follow food safety practices.

When should you retrain?

- When workers are not washing their hands properly.
- If you see that toilet paper is not being disposed of properly
- If damaged or contaminated produce is being harvested
- If there are missing dates or initials on monitoring logs and record sheets.
- If sick workers are handling produce
- If SOPs are not being followed
- If workers are not using designated break areas
- OR...If a food borne illness is traced back to your farm

In summary,

- Every farm should have a Food Safety Manager
- Food Safety Managers should play an active role in ensuring food safety practices are being followed.
- Farmworkers should be adequately trained on health and hygiene practices, risk assessment, sources and routes of contamination, etc.
- A written Food Safety Plan can assist in training farmworkers.
- Training should be periodically reviewed, especially when practices change, problems arise, or when new workers are hired
- Here are some resources that may be helpful to you when designing your worker trainings or farm food safety plan. These include templates for log sheets and SOPs, Food safety plan templates, FSMA requirements for recordkeeping, and much more.

Thank you for watching Part 1: Creating a Worker Training Program. If you have any questions or would like clarification or help identifying resources, do not hesitate to reach out. You can reach Extension Specialist Robert Hadad via email at rgh26@cornell.edu or by phone at 585-739-4065. You can reach CVP Technician, Caitlin Tucker, at cv275@cornell.edu or by phone at 573-544-4783. If you would like to learn more about the Cornell Vegetable Program visit cvp.cce.cornell.edu.

Next Up: Part 2: Food Safety – and Why it Matters!