



Episode Ten - Corrective actions

Welcome to episode 10 of Food Safety Bites Brought to you the University of Wisconsin Madison, and funded by the USDA Food Safety Outreach Program, this is your host Harriet Behar. This episode is focused on corrective actions when preventative measures have failed. In these podcast episodes, I will identify issues, and provide suggestions for how to reduce various fresh produce contamination risks and keep your customers safe. We will not talk in detail about what is required for a GAP audit or a FSMA inspection. If you want more information on those, please see the links on the website where you found these podcasts.

As I just said, I will not cover in detail what is required for a GAP audit or a produce safety rule inspection, but it's important to know that corrective actions are required if there is a problem during these third-party reviews of your farm. Even if you are not going to be audited or inspected, thinking ahead to where your food safety system might fail, and what you might do to correct the problem both short term and long term, is a useful exercise to help you find areas of improvement on your farm.

Basically, **corrective actions** are improvements to your processes to deal with undesirable situations or where your protocols and systems have broken down. Corrections are different from preventative actions, since the correction is typically what you do when you see the problem and prevention is the training, systems and protocols you set up to prevent the problem from happening in the first place. Any good farm should have corrective actions happening throughout the season - they are just often small adjustments needed to make changes to your systems when things have gone wrong and protocols are not being followed.

Here are a couple of examples. You notice that an employee is chewing tobacco on the carrot washing line and spitting on the floor near some produce boxes, or a worker is seen peeing at the edge of the field where there is no hand wash station, and they come back to picking tomatoes without cleaning their hands. Both of these issues would need an immediate corrective action. In the first one, the worker should be told to remove his tobacco and it should be reviewed that this is not allowed. It is possible that the worker may have not been working at the farm when the training took place in the spring and they were not trained that eating or chewing tobacco when working with produce is not allowed, when they were hired in late summer. For a corrective action, that wash line would need to be shut down right then, and the entire area cleaned and sanitized before cleaning anymore carrots. The produce boxes that could have been contaminated are segregated and not used. In the second instance, the worker is directed to the nearest hand wash station and told to wash their hands before going back to picking tomatoes. In both cases, the corrective action would include further training of these employees and perhaps the full crew, to make sure that everyone knows what your protocols are, and why they are important.

Consider preventative measures for these two scenarios including a refresher training, and more signage in the pack area specifically reminding workers that there is no tobacco use, eating or spitting where produce is being handled. For the second scenario, perhaps there



might need to be a porta – pottie placed at that field, a 4 wheeler available to all crew so that they can go back to the pack shed to use the bathroom, and for sure a hand wash station needs to go to the field with every crew. There could be retraining to assure workers that you support and encourage them to go a restroom with a hand wash facility whenever they need to and that urinating at the edge of the field is problematic for a variety of reasons. And remember - as the boss or crew leader, you set the tone and lead by example. You must practice what you preach too!

Self- assessment- Take a look at where there may be weaknesses in your system and how you might fix them, going through a self-assessment and finding areas of improvement can prevent serious issues later where you may feel that you cannot sell product due to a failure in your food safety protocols. To help you evaluate your system, you could look at the Good Agricultural Practices audit checklists and see how well your activities, buildings and equipment measure up. There is a link on the website where you found these podcasts.

If you had to take a corrective action, it is a good idea to document what happened and what you did, so in case it happens again, you can identify if further actions should be done. Part of that documentation should be a clear description of the problem and which food safety activity may not have been followed. Is this something that could occur in other areas of the farm, or is it limited to the area where it occurred? How does this breakdown in food safety affect other activities? What did you do to contain or limit the damage caused by the offending activity? What is the root cause of the problem, and what could be done to fix the problem now, as well as prevent it in the future? Consider monitoring the situation for the next week or two, to make sure your food safety protocols are consistently being followed. It can be difficult to change people's behavior at times, especially if they are used to doing something or feel that what you are asking of them is unreasonable.

Communication- Keep the lines of communication open and help everyone on the team understand how to do the right thing. You may not be able to see the solution as clearly as the workers, and you could have a stronger system and more buy-in if you include others in the development of any preventative actions you take. Make sure you are considering all aspects when developing the long-term solution including, personnel, practices, equipment, various monitoring activities such as use of sanitizer in wash water and even unpredictable weather events.

Even a small mistake can result in time and money spent to rewash or destroy produce. Having a system in place to recognize problems quickly and implement actions that prevent a future occurrence is part of continually improving your food safety program.

So that's it for this episode of Food Safety Bites, the next episode is manure and other fertility inputs. This is your host Harriet Behar brought to you by the University of Wisconsin Madison, talk to you next time!