



Episode Eight - Training of the farm manager, farm workers

Welcome to episode 8 of Food Safety Bites Brought to you by the University of Wisconsin Madison, and funded by the USDA Food Safety Outreach Program, this is your host Harriet Behar. This episode is **training of farm supervisors and farm workers**. 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.

Why should you take the time to train everyone involved on your farm? First, people who touch produce or work in produce handling areas are a potential source of contamination from not washing hands after eating or using the bathroom. Each person may have a different level of hygiene, or there may be different cultures or even languages so you cannot assume that everyone working on your farm will do the activities to the level you want them too, unless you train them. There should be personal hygiene expectations for all workers that come into contact in any way, and at any time, with produce or produce handling areas. Even if an office worker only comes to the pack shed once a day to collect time sheets, they could be touching doorknobs, countertops, the pens and clipboards that the other workers touch. In addition to giving directions, you will get more buy-in if you also share with the workers why the protocols are important, how they lessen risk and keep the customers from getting sick. A food safety problem could harm the economic stability of the farm too.

Visitors should be given personal hygiene instructions, especially if you have a u-pick operation, or if Community Supported Agriculture customers come to your farm.

Training – Each employee should be trained when they are hired to perform the tasks they are hired to do. Remember employees here includes anyone working, paid or not. They might be a volunteer, intern or friend working for the day. But everyone handling produce needs at least some level of training and instruction. Focus training on the tasks the person will do. If some workers never work in the pack shed, they may not need to know how to add sanitizer to a wash tank, but if there is a chance that they will, then they should be trained. Think about the best way to engage your workers, teach by doing, and then have the workers do the task while you watch. Periodically have refresher training, especially if it seems some of the protocols are not consistently followed. Put up signs to remind workers to do the right thing, make recordkeeping easy with appropriately placed clipboards and pens. Signs can be colorful or humorous with smiley or frowny faces, to remind workers to wash their hands, clean and sanitize the food contact surfaces, use only acceptable harvest crates and tubs. Use your short, written food safety plan with your farm's rules and policies as well as SOPs of how to do tasks to form the basis of your training. Using a written document allows you to make sure you don't miss anything when you are doing the training, and you can hand out the document for workers or volunteers to read too. Often CSA farms have a 1-page summary of their policies for folks doing a work share day, for example.



If you have workers whose first language is not English, the signage could include pictures, demonstrating and reminding them what you want them to do. Empower your workers to bring food safety issues to their supervisor if they see a problem. If you have livestock, train workers that clothing and boots used with the livestock are not to be used in produce fields.

The trainer needs to know the subject and know how to implement the food safety activities on the farm. If it seems the protocols are not being followed, then the supervisor will need to retrain the group. It is a good idea to train periodically anyway, especially if you are doing a different process or are working with a new crop. If you had a discussion on how to harvest and pack tomatoes in April, do it again in July. Supervisors in the pack shed and, in the field, should be aware of food safety issues and be prepared to answer worker questions. Have your food safety plan in an accessible place where everyone knows how to find it.

Harvest workers should be taught to recognize produce that shouldn't be harvested and is reasonably likely to be contaminated or is contaminated, like produce damage that could allow bacterial infiltration into the fruit or vegetable, or poop or other signs that animals were feeding or present in the field the night before. Harvest workers are your eyes and ears in the field - make sure they know what to look for and remind them that you don't want them to harvest any veggies with poop on it - it's just not worth the risk. It's helpful if they note signs of animals on a log sheet, that way you can keep track of what sort of animals are getting in and where so that you can take steps to keep them out.

Consider keeping a record on when you did your training, who was trained and what they were taught. If you are harvesting and handling cabbages for the first time, and there are workers that have only been trained to harvest green beans, you will want to go over the different harvest, quality and handling requirements for the cabbage. If you change to a different sanitizer in your wash tanks in mid-season, it might have a different concentration requirement and appear differently on the test strip when correct. Everyone who might add that sanitizer should be retrained and noted that they were taught how to do the right thing. Too high a concentration of sanitizer can also make people sick. The record will remind you who was trained on what, and also serve as proof of your training if a question about food safety ever came up.

Training is a critical component of a food safety plan- don't assume your workers are on the same page as you! They might have worked on a farm before where they did things differently. Training assures the farm operator that the workers have the knowledge to do their jobs correctly and to their standards. Supervisors need to make sure the workers have the tools they need. For example, if they use gloves to harvest zucchini, have them present in the field. Training can be at the beginning of the season, or just do just a few minutes each day or week. Be aware the training is done in a way so everyone can understand, don't use unfamiliar scientific terms or legalese, but don't treat them like they're little kids either. Be aware that some workers may need to be taught more than once, especially if it seemed they did not hear what you said the first time.



If a farm is subject to the Food Safety Modernization Act produce safety rule or GAP, then you must train, but even if not, it is a good idea any way so people know what to do and everyone on the farm is doing the same thing.

It can be difficult to make the time to do the training, but if you do that, your workers realize how important this is...since they are getting paid to listen and learn. Training does not need to be long - often one sit down training at the beginning of the season and then a short refresher throughout the season is enough. Or, a very short conversation for volunteers is enough since they will just be there one day. Everyone on the farm is part of the team and part of your farm's food safety culture, including all family members, kids, neighbors, anyone who comes on the farm and most will feel pride that they are doing the right thing.

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