



Episode Nine - Visitors to the farm

Welcome to episode 9 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 **managing visitors to your farm**. 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.

Agritourism, where you share an agriculturally based activity with the general public and bring visitors to your farm or ranch, can be a fun experience for all involved. School or other group tours and even your vendors like to visit farms, buy the freshest produce, and learn where and how their food is produced. There are many examples of situations when you might have visitors on your farm: pick your own berries, apples, or other fruit orchards, pumpkin patches where families visit in the fall, farmstead roadside produce stands, and having community supported agriculture subscription holders volunteer to work on your farm are all examples where people, who might not be trained to your food safety protocols, will be on your farm and could be in contact with your production and handling areas. These activities can be a significant income source and the farmer wants to be as welcoming to the public as they can and provide them with a worthwhile experience so they will tell their friends to go to that farm too! Your food safety standards do not need to be lowered when you have these visitors on your farm. It's up to you communicate to visitors both with signage and verbally about your produce safety-based rules and make it easy for them to do the right thing.

Communication - First, think about how you will communicate your policies about food safety to your visitors. It is a good idea to tell everyone who will be on your farm about your policies. You can tell them in an email before they arrive, but it's a good idea to spend a few minutes talking about it when they arrive as well. You can type up a single page sheet that says your rules and use this as a guide for a couple minute discussion. The training session does not need to be long at all - just a few minutes to talk about your basic rules, point out where the bathrooms and handwashing is, and answer questions. For example, don't assume that they know not to use the field as a bathroom and to not change their baby's diaper in your lettuce rows! If they will be doing specific things like harvesting for your CSA boxes, they might need more training on those topics.

Here are some basic rules you might have on your farm that need communicating to visitors:

Pets- wherever you advertise your operation to the public, on your website, on Facebook, on the radio or in a brochure- make it clear that pets are NOT allowed and should be left at home. No one wants a dog getting overheated in a hot car, and you definitely do not want a dog walking around your property, pooping and urinating or getting loose and running through your produce field. Everyone says THEIR dog is different and well-trained, but we know that the first thing a dog will do when it gets to the country is to run wild, including in your fields. Dogs who



are scared can even bite someone if provoked, and this can be a liability issue for you. In addition, many people have allergies. I will discuss your own pets and managing them with food safety in mind, in another episode.

Service Animals- Dogs who are helping people with disabilities could come on the farm, since they are well-trained and this may be required under the American with Disabilities Act. You can ask if the animal is required because of a disability, and what tasks they perform, but cannot request further information or documentation on that animal. You do not need to allow animals are there for comfort, therapy or emotional support.

Illness- If the people are going to be walking in your fields or visiting your packing areas, tell them not to come if they are sick. This is another issue to put out in your advertising, so they know this before they visit your farm. If they have a fever, nausea, vomiting, an upset stomach, cramps or diarrhea, ask them to please stay at home, your farm is a place where food is produced and you want to keep everyone healthy.

First aid kit- make sure you have a well-stocked first aid kit, along with emergency numbers, in case someone gets hurt and needs attention.

Provide containers for picking or food grade bags for customers to use- you don't know what type of containers they may bring with them, nor if those containers could possibly be carrying contamination. If the bottom of their bucket has bird poop on it, you don't want to them drag that through your strawberry patch.

Handwashing- Just as you have your workers wash their hands when handling produce, provide well-stocked hand washing stations in appropriate locations for your visitors who will be touching produce. Having some signage that clearly describes the wetting, soaping, scrubbing, rinsing and drying of their hands will aid in getting them to do the right thing. If there are children, make sure the adults understand that they need to make sure their children are doing this correctly before they go out and pick blueberries.

Toilets- Have your toilet facilities well marked and let people know that they cannot defecate or urinate in or around the field or change a baby's diapers while they are out in your produce fields.

Water from hoses or sprinklers- It might be nice to provide water for your visitors so they stay hydrated. Provide it in food grade containers, since most hoses are not food grade material and you don't want them drinking from them, and surface waters like creeks and ponds are not acceptable for drinking and could make people sick. If people are not familiar with rural and wild areas, they may not realize that water from open surface waters, while it may look clean, is not drinkable.

Children- make sure that children are accompanied by adults who oversee their handwashing, and that they are being supervised when in your fields etc. Kids can touch hanging fruit and not pick it, contaminating it for the next person. They can also get injured by playing with equipment and tools, or trip on hoses and irrigation lines.



Eating, drinking, chewing gum or tobacco, smoking- all of these activities should be highly discouraged to do in the growing or packing areas. Explain verbally, in signage or in a pamphlet how saliva can transmit pathogens if they eat while harvesting. Remind them that many people will be coming to the fields after them - those people don't want to see strawberry hulls and apple cores. If you are growing tomatoes, humans using tobacco can be a vector for a tomato disease called tobacco mosaic virus. You can have dedicated areas for picnicking or having a dedicated area for a fancy chef field to plate dinner in the field. Encourage the time in the field to be for touring or picking and eating or smoking will happen after they leave the field. They can bring in their own water bottles in non-glass containers, but that should be the extent to their eating and drinking in the field.

Littering- Let the public know that litter, especially food packaging, can attract pests, and that this is not allowed, have garbage receptacles present in appropriate locations.

Petting zoos- If you have an area where children can touch farm animals, have a place for the children and their parents to wash their hands and use hand sanitizer afterwards if they wish. There have been numerous outbreaks and illnesses related to petting zoos where farms did not provide handwashing facilities to their visitors, and the families ate after petting the animals and where sickened, and some of them very seriously. Remember, sanitizer is not a replacement for handwashing.

Tell **your pick your own customers specific areas to pick-** you can limit your risk of contamination to specific areas, as well as need to keep out these visitors from areas where pesticides or fertility inputs had recently been applied. If you don't want them in the barn, in the fields destined for wholesale, or in your house, tell them that.

A few other safety tips to avoid liability issues- request your visitors wear close-toed shoes to avoid snubbing their toes or worse, prevent public access any equipment which could have sharp edges, ask adults to keep kids from running around, or provide some flat and even grassy areas where families with children could play safely. Ask them to be aware of insects and not annoy or touch the wildlife.

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