**Day 1, Tuesday, Feb. 11th, 2020**

**Produce Safety Workgroup Meeting**

***Produce Safety Alliance Update by Gretchen Wall (Cornell University)***

Summary: Based on evaluation data and record the training course outreach has been increasing both domestically and internationally. There are more grower training courses with more international participants (majority from Latin America), however, more participants are needed. The domestic grower training program needs to outreach to more underserved communities (majority of current participants are male caucasean farmers who are at least middle aged). Growers are requesting local resources of various third party services such as private labs, sanitation companies, etc. Keep momentum of the training programs by building on evaluation data to improve, NECAFS’s need for more collaborative funding for after the June

2021 deadline and more outreach to international & underrepresented communities.

***National PSA Pre and Post Test Evaluation***

* Progress: Used on all NECAFS TSSP supported courses. Streamlined analysis template
* & reports
* Action: discussion of results in Produce Safety WG.
* Based on 2019 summary data, overall documented knowledge gain increased by 18% (raised to 77%). Then pre-knowledge in modules
* The more evaluation data corrected the stronger evidence shown that the training programs are making an impact. This can help in receiving more funding and support.

***Summary of On-Farm Readiness Review (OFRR) Evaluations by Meredith Melendez (Rutgers University)***

A common deficiency on farms with various produce sales of participant farms income (mostly the farms with larger incomes) was inadequate record keeping. A considerable number of farms are also deficient in testing their water for cleaning and sanitation.

* Farms in every state need further technical assistance they can access for consultation.
* Significant monetary investment needs for Northeastern farmers was moderately low.
* Participation is coming from farms of various sizes. Not just industrial farms

Questions:

* Deadline for OFRR reports will be changing later, the date is not noted in discussion.

***Farmer’s Feedback: Farmers 1st year with FSMA Inspection by Andre Cantelmo (Heron Pond Farm)***

Summary: What farmers are hearing from NECAFS and other sources; their comments and concerns related to food safety. Majority of growers have feedback on problems with needs for improvement, but they also feel that the inspection processes were better than they expected and respectful. Most of the feedback for improvements sums to a common miscommunication occurring between farmers and food safety trainers/regulators. This miscommunication that confuses/frustrates farmers varies on an array of topics: food safety implementation (harvesting conditions, multi hatted regulators), equipement usage (AZ line washers, bush line washers, barrel washers), and cleaning & sanitation practices (harvesting equipment, water infiltration, row covers). Farmers are asking for more definitive responses to what are required to satisfy food safety inspections (secondary suggestions confuse them with what is primary). Farmers are pessimistic of FSMA and the current direction it’s taking.

***Produce Safety Research Consortium by Socrates Trujillo & Marianne Solomotis (Office of Applied Research and Safety Assessment Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Food and Drug Administration)***

Summary: What are opportunities for further research? What can be done to generate new knowledge?

* ID more data gaps: Pre and post harvesting like agricultural water testing
* OARSA Produce Safety Research Consortium: collaborate in regional comparisons to provide produce-related and on-site environmental collections to expand research
* People are looking for bacterial pathogens and parasites but aren't looking for viruses in soil microbiome and produce.
* Missing pieces of research that impact the microbiomes: air, soil microbiome.
* Future directions: analysis of 3 year preliminary data to develop new methods in detecting viruses, Campylobacter, and other bacterial pathogens in soil and water
* Identify potential resources, facilitate collaboration, and identify further knowledge gaps.
* Soil microbiome research is not ready for publishing yet tbd if presented at IFT.

***Produce Safety Group Discussion facilitated by Chris Callahan (University of Vermont Extension) & Betsy Bihn (Cornell University)***

* What challenges remain, what gaps exist, and what can we do about it in the following categories:
  + Research
  + Education/training
  + Practice
* What results are being heard about earlier ring true to what you have seen or discussed with in practice?

Voting (3 votes per person): What are your top 5 research and education topics?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Research** | **Vote #** |
| Investigate financial incentive/disincentives of implementing food safety practices for workers | 44 |
| What is the risk of growing on soil Impact on stacking boxes Impact of drops Soil vs mulch vs boxes | 27 |
| Clean & sanitizing efficacy studies with small farms Drying practices | 18 |
| Hygienic Design Foam rollers | 18 |
| What quality increases in shelf-life, crop price, employee satisfaction come from implementing food safety practices | 18 |
| Risk of ingesting soil/water on produce | 14 |
| Baseline background pathogen levels in difference facilities/operations | 12 |
| Best education methods to reach farmers | 8 |
| What is the impact of improved infrastructure on compliance | 5 |
| Bio soil amendments of animal origin research  Types of manure, crop FDA has some data, working on models, green research is also underway | 4 |
| Cheap and eco friendly water treatment | 4 |
| Program evaluation and long-term outcomes | 0 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Education  (Educational materials/practice recommendations must have scientific basis to things that cost money). Need to be supported with science when recommended costs based changes to growers.** | **Vote #** |
| Share results of research more effectively FAQ document Talk to CPS | 35 |
| Best practices for drying equipment | 33 |
| Aquaponics/Hydroponics guide | 31 |
| Food safety for beginning farmers/getting started guide for new farmers (Wholesale for Success) https://www.uvm.edu/extension/necafs/clearinghouse/resources/small-farmer%E2%80%99s-practical-guide-food-safety | 26 |
| Don't power wash and here's why | 15 |
| Water change schedule and decision making | 12 |
| Facts sheets for state specific resources | 10 |
| Wash water effluent/discharge | 10 |
| Evolution of developing a cleaning program. When do you move to sanitizing? | 9 |
| Equipment pro/con. Grower testimonials | 9 |
| Manufacturer education - expectations | 6 |
| Map of vendor with certificates of compliance Factsheet/Educational material for these vendors | 6 |
| Cleaning and sanitizing for advance training | 6 |
| 1 page of best practices for farmers training workers Impact on farm worker harvest efficacy Why they need to change practices Different farms have different rules | 6 |
| Language barriers in worker training | 5 |
| Proper sampling of ag water | 3 |
| Sanitizer label discrepancies | 2 |
| Considerations for farms that are scaling up | 1 |
| Herb drying | 1 |
| Infiltration | 1 |
| Best harvest practices in adv training | 0 |

**Day 1, Tuesday, Feb. 11th, 2020**

**Preventive Controls Workgroup Meeting**

**Action Items:**

* Introductions:
  + There are products that can have safety hazards at which food safety would be needed
    - Know your product and what hazards are in them
  + Update for each workgroup in preventive controls in general
  + Objectives and Timeline: See slides
    - Timeline: Purpose of what the working groups wanted to do and receive and their expected outcome
  + Survey of the Workgroup Assessment with 103 responses
    - Small (fewer than 500 employees) vs very small business terms (less than 1 million dollars of revenue) of federal term and the purpose towards NECAFS’ mission for the survey data taken
* General slide information such as summaries, recaps, updates can all be read on the slides.
* Polls were conducted during the meeting take were exported and shared for future use.
* Background and overview- See slides for details
  + Data: Data is everywhere and it is how you analyze the data can mean different results, there needs to be some context.
  + Preventive Control and Sanitary Human Food Operations: They are new operations that have been added to the inspection list.
  + The current progress of inspections to date between what they have accomplished this year vs what is planned by contract to be achieved.
  + Assignment update: 02.01.2020:
    - Each section is based on their prioritization towards the current times of issues
    - RAC = Raw Agricultural Commodity
    - Goal to get the data out and published by March
  + Estimated Inspector Hours:
    - NAI: No Action Indicate, VAI: Voluntary Action Indicate, OAI: Official Action Indicate
  + FSMA Wanted to separate the inspection into two parts of HR and NHR that can bring inspections well over 5,000+
  + Inspection scope: If you are a small firm you can self-attest, however, if you do not self-attest before your inspection then you would automatically be inspected for a full scope inspection
    - Link/form posted on the slide to self-attest
    - You can work with state partners (in person) on completing said forms
  + Training is one of the biggest issues because they are training students in large numbers, roughly 40 students per class.
* Month Metrics - see data on slides
  + PCQI Certificate (not international) by month trend line is going down either due to:
    - Burnout because it has been 5 years (since 2015)
    - The certificate has no expiration date for re-certification
  + Understanding the audience knowing that not everyone can’t handle data, so knowing your target audience and designing around them is important
* Subgroup’s updates
  + Awareness Group
  + Evaluation Group
    - The outputs are made for all the PCQI to help anyone teaching the course
      * Feedback for any instructor should fill out the form.
  + Resource Group
    - There is a guideline for feedback for reading the definitions
      * Defined certain words so there is a clear understanding for the audience and using a rubric to have accurate scoring
      * Poll for more resources

**Decisions (Group discussion outcomes):**

* Introductions
  + Survey of the Workgroup Assessment with 103 responses
    - Post Thoughts: This survey data is supporting data towards the lack of knowledge gained by each course
* Month Metrics
  + Questions and key thoughts to keep in mind that was spoken about the data:
    - Why is there a decline?
    - How are small processors, FSPCA, course evaluations responding?
    - How will PCQI change over time and will the certification be updated for those who have taken the certification years ago as there is always something new learned every year?
      * Why are there no videos in the program that are engaging?
    - What is the success rate? Are there additional efforts in helping them?
* Subgroup’s updates
  + Awareness Group Questions:
    - Who are the people that are in need? What does that look like?
      * There is a need to raise awareness - it has to be very diverse. Have a toolbox to give everyone, with all the messages to maximize the outreach. To widen the scope of people who want to be in food safety.
    - Is there a focus on the North East?
    - Because it is NECAFS there is but there is a widening scope that it can be translated for everyone.
  + Funding that is different from the part of the rule, so having the resources for the produce. So it is harder to get funding and resources for this part of the rule
  + Databases aren’t around about processors aren’t a thing
    - Penn and NY have a database, they are new, very the documentation, but there is nothing standard.
  + There needs to be a closer relationship being with the regulators and the educators
    - There is a need for a communication vehicle
  + People are driven by money, so that is how you have to comply.
    - There seems to be a lot of miscommunication with all the rules and regulations.
  + Resource Group
    - * There is a guideline for feedback for reading the definitions
        + They are going to live on the NECAFS, but it is going to be different from the website because there is going to be some review progress.

This is going to be more specific to certain processors

* + - * Rubric
        + Defining Accessibility and how wording can affect people
* Open Mic
  + Kerry Kaylegian - Penn State Extension:
    - Implying Food Systems on raw milk.
    - Resource gap
    - Food Safety Food turned into Food Systems for smaller on the system on basic GMPs and the area of the foods. It is both quality and safety.
    - List of the processors, newsletters, about cheeses, raw milk, and dairy.
* Mary Choate - New Hampshire - Food Processors
  + Basics and cleaning and sanitation
  + Then day two on cGMPs and the FDA
  + There an online tool to help where you fall
* Amanda Kinchla and Jill Fitzsimmons - UMass - FSOP - Product Development and Value-Added and Frozen Produce and Food Safety Outreach
  + Rising awareness early
  + Think about the long term plan.
  + Canning and open access, with the SOPs with open recipes
  + Survey about the Blueberries and Spinach to see if there is a need for people.
  + Food Safety Plans for Small Processors - looking for producers from the resources for the people but it’s shared.
    - But relate it to a story and being aware of the cost and things they need to be paying for.
  + All states don’t have databases on a bigger picture is that you need to start thinking about policy with demonstrating and documenting the results
* Bruno Xavier - Cornell - FSTOP grant
  + Preventive Control rule with hard to reach communities
    - Simple is okay and the guide can be simple because it allows it to be more engaging for people.
  + This is more focused on Food Safety then Amanda’s but they are trying to create a course
    - Promote it in NYC, with online classes.
  + They are trying to improve Food Safety awareness, with over 800 companies.
    - They need to work better at developing
* Google Food Safety group
  + Focused around commercial kitchens
  + Needs more Food Safety people,
  + please contact, cgadavies@gmail.com
  + But they aren’t sure if the clients know what it looks like
* Questions at the end
  + Kids in general - Teaching them allows them to teach their parents.
    - Wellness and Nutrition, but it depends on the school
      * It is pretty outside the foodservice, but it can be to the students and to the staff

**Day 2, Wednesday, Feb. 12th, 2020**

**Needs Assessment Workgroup Meeting**

**Betsy Bihn and Laura Pineda-Bermudez (Cornell University):**

Summary of Local Food Safety Collaborative Needs Assessment Survey Report   
(see the slides and survey report in more detail at [localfoodsafety.org](http://localfoodsaftery.org))

* This is in Peer Review process and will be published
* The identities on the National vs Local slide represent respondents who may identify as more than one identity
* Wholesalers were not surveyed
* Most of the interviewees were either more looking towards industry or were confused re: inconsistent requirements
* Finding needs: Education and Outreach

**Chris Callahan and Hannah Doyle (University of Vermont Extension):**

NECAFS Food Safety Needs Assessment Systematic Review

(see the slides and literature review)

**Group discussion (NEEDS IN PURPLE / INFLUENCING FACTORS IN GREEN)**

**KNOWLEDGE**

**Success stories/ideas**

* Added benefit/collaboration
* Food safety knowledge helps access knowledge about other farm operations
* Using existing groups to share knowledge
* Discuss why (why does it matter? who are we serving?)
* Value growers’ time by combining opportunities to convey knowledge
* Video, photos, and digestible formats for all learning styles/approaches (including hard copies) – example: Meredith: growers looking at photos of how others’ setups are lacking
* Using resources from collaborators
* Self-assessment checklists
* Using interactive materials (example: Vermont Agriculture for where you fall under FSMA)
* Sanitary (Hygienic) Design - trainers need the know-how
* Flash Drives with templates and resources all in one place
* Consider there's always something to learn - knowledge flows in all directions

**Challenges/barriers**

* Specific questions re: production and sales (example: if we grow grapes on-farm and "sell" them to ourselves for processing…?)
* Regulatory landscape: regulations evolve over time
* Exemption confusion
* Conflicting opinions, auditors vs. inspectors
* Definitions (examples: “farm,” “food,” “exemption”)

**MINDSET**

**Success stories/ideas**

* Context - discuss benefits of food safety (open markets, increased efficiencies, informed discussion-making, recordkeeping, good horticultural practices)
* Early successes help gain confidence
* Who are you feeding? (Consumers = community)
* One-on-one service provision: "Trust gatekeeper" brings trusted resources into the conversation (these sources may not be regulators)
* Partnerships
* Post-audit mindset shift (“learned a lot,” “hadn't previously considered…”)
* Farmer-to-farmer (hearing it from a peer); a "convert" can help convert others; target leaders
* Food safety lenses: Efficiency AND Food Safety
* Pride in positive feedback
* A shift from "what do I need to do?” to a more holistic approach
* Business/entrepreneurship lens: food safety is a “cost of doing business”

**Challenges/barriers**   
*(note: it was pointed out- challenges can be successes if you leverage them correctly)*

* Fear of the unknown (Checklists, plan-building, what do I not know? how do I fit into the landscape?)
* Long-term process/progress (can also be seen as an advantage: that food safety is a long term investment that will pay off)
* Lack of concern about the real risk of food safety problems because they haven’t had run in with pathogenic safety
* Generational (differences based on age of operator/age of operation)
* Historical distrust of government/regulation (example: for people of color)

**TIME**

**Success stories/ideas**

* Time management
* DST: decision support tools
* Be mindful of season (example: Ag Week in DE in dead of winter, training for and education in off-season)
* There are interactions with capital that can “buy time”
* Instituting systems and schedules
* Proper delegation

**Challenges/barriers**

* Time is a finite resource
* Time = $$$ (food safety sometimes not considered to have a "value"?!)
* Labor shortage
* Deadlines are not always realistic
* Difficulty with delegation (management: fitting people into proper roles and responsibilities which utilize strengths and consider pay rates)

**CAPITAL**

**Success stories/ideas**

* Subsidized costs of training
* Partnerships
* Free resources (example: 2 free water samples, ideas to reuse containers with liners, etc.)
* Shared costs (water testing with common well shared equipment, bulk purchasing)
* Creative funding (FDA: state CAPs, well caps / SCBGP: hand-washing / EQIP program in MA / PSIG in VT / equipment grants to access capital)
* Low-interest loans (under-utilized? Example: Food Storage Facility Loan (FSFL)
* Helping producers write grants
* Creative “reframing” of issues (example, utilizing NRCS EQIP funding- washing near barn: could that be a drainage problem issue??)

**Challenges/barriers**

* Trainers/Consultants in demand: PSA training is cheap
* Spreading word about capital access opportunities
* Older infrastructure

**TRAINING**

**Success stories/ideas**

* Unconventional training opportunities (example: word-of-mouth for an Off-Farm Readiness Review, over 50 people, informal)
* Risk assessment workshops
* 2-day workshops allow more time for context
* Hands-on demos (example: in ME, glow-germ)
* Water-testing program on-the-ground (including 2 free samples)
* Food safety plan writing workshop (New York)
* One-on-one TA/guidance

**Challenges**

* Reach: Some growers "not connected"
* Conflict of interest (example: individual getting trained and "renting themselves" to a producer as an employee)
* Shifting regulations: training "to the rule" and knowing it will eventually change (example: water, BSAAO's)
* Recertification needed / manager certification
* Training needs ever-evolving
* Risk assessment is unclear/ uncertain (how do growers make decisions about accepting risk?)
* 2-day trainings (some farmers opt for a 1-day option in a different state which would cause a missed opportunity for face-to-face)
* State-by-state discrepancies: training is different everywhere; if someone is trained out of state will that affect them?
* Outreach bottleneck: It takes time to develop resources and tool kits

**FARM TYPE**

**Success stories/ideas**

* Enterprises/crops already regulated by pre-FSMA regulations
* Farms involved in other certification programs (organic, GAP)
* Associations of types of farms (can share tactics and knowledge)

**Challenges/barriers**

* Uncertain territory: hydroponic and aquaponics
* Noncommercial growers (food banks, etc)
* Generational (tenure of management, age of grower) - consider creating resources for everyone, including nondigital
* Outreach challenges: difficult to know everything about everything, people rely on one source for what they need to do
* Organic farms: NOP standard may conflict with PSR

**FARM SIZE**

**Success stories/ideas**

* More resources on a large farm (including management/equipment)
* Size sometimes related to diversification (larger farms less diversified?)
* Many small farms coming to training even when not required to do so (practice- motivation, "in case they grow")
* Large farms more likely to have been regulated previously

**Challenges**

* Agritourism: different enterprises may not have had exposure to different services/providers
* FDA works with "very large farms" (sometimes difficult to identify roles + responsibilities, understanding who is responsible for food safety)
* Management of resources (inc. workers, animal intrusion)
* Smaller farms: fewer resources, more crop diversity (more to manage, more potential for cross-contamination)
* Monocrops more susceptible to weather/pest issues
* Small farm mindset: “WE are not the problem”

**MARKET**

**Success stories/ideas**

* Third party audits (GAP, etc)
* Written plans (one-on-one planning help for smaller processors
* Non-profits providing federal assistance
* Buyer requirements
* Beginning farmer training (inc. helping beginner farmers get into the market they want and how to meet the market requirements)
* Training with farmers markets managers
* How to sell to the government

**Challenges**

* Complex operations: who is in charge at different levels?
* Buyer education (example: need to know that there is no certificate for FSMA compliance)
* Inspection vs. audit
* Exemption confusion (example: direct market, but over $500,000)
* Market requirements might exceed regulatory requirements
* Language barriers

**REGION**

**Success stories/ideas**

* Smaller states: less travel time
* Trainings in many locations (example: service providers are abundant in the Northeast region)
* Region-specific practices/equipment

**Challenges/barriers**

* Seasonality (movement of workers, some regions don’t have an offseason)
* Size/travel time to certain areas of the regions
* Specific regional problems (example: in our region we are very focused on e.coli, regions can have specific pathogenic hazards
* Urban centers (different needs, different markets)
* Weather patterns and events
* Cultural differences of audience

**OTHER NOTES:**

**CONSIDER INTERACTIONS** between the frameworks, consider “3 dimensions” – if you bump up in one area, what effect does that have?)

**OUTREACH and ACCESS came up quite a bit**

**DOT VOTING**  
Red – “which of these NEEDS can we actually do most about?”  
Blue – “which of these NEEDS do you see as most important?”

*(note: eliminated votes for influencing factors below—voters didn’t understand exercise)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Time | Training | Capital | Knowledge | Mindset |
| Red | 1 | 13 | 0 | 9 | 20 |
| Blue | 0 | 18 | 8 | 16 | 4 |

**Day 2, Wednesday, Feb. 12th, 2020**

**Buyer Workgroup Meeting**

*Meeting introductions and Review of 2019 Albany meeting by Elizabeth Newbold (University of Vermont Extension)*

**Summary:** with buyers asking for a variety of audits including state specific audits, like state FSMA certification, the last meeting mentioned that there is a need to improve communication and resources to growers from buyers and states.

*Introductions and Discussion: thoughts/changes/additions to summary of 2019 meeting? by Hans Estrin (University of Vermont Extension)*

**Summary:** Audience introduction and sharing experiences of interactions with buyers and their relations with growers. Many states in the Northeast region have their own audits that vary from each other and the federal audit program, FSMA. These and the uncertainties of the choice of audits that buyers make which increase growers having both unnecessary audits done, confusion of between audit and PC rules, and frustrated relations with buyers.

*Developing a Handbook of Produce Safety Standards for Buyers by Elizabeth Newbold & Hans Estrin (University of Vermont Extension)*

**Summary:** Introduced a project for an online handbook for buyers to provide a collaborative tool to provide both common (FSMA) and specific knowledge of state audits for buyers in the Northeast region. Keeping in mind what consumers desire as the primary goal: to provide consumers with fresh local foods that have taste, nutrition, and a transparent story behind it. That gives consumers connection, vibrancy, and MEANING to their food.

*Vermont Produce Program: Buyer Outreach Initiative by Gina Clithero & Kristina Sweet (VT Agency of Agriculture)*

**Summary**: Started in august 2019 to develop and strengthen relationships between buyers and produce growers in Vermont through information gathering and reaching out to buyers.

*Meeting introductions and Review of 2019 Albany meeting by Elizabeth Newbold (University of Vermont Extension)*

History

* Started in 2017 from collaborations articulating a need for a buyer panel in 2018. Last year’s meeting to be output oriented to address challenges

Review of 2019 buyers meeting

* Questionnaire
* What’s happening on consumer education at retail level?
  + Confusion between audits and inspections
  + State specific audits
    - Observed the wide range of variability between state requirements and audits

What did we learn

* Crazy state variations that exist in inspection and audit
* Only a few buyers joined last year so need to reach out to have more buyer opinions
* With the many buyer opportunities growers have expresses fatigue from constant audits

Next Steps

* Outreach to buyers
  + Addressing at communal level most effective
* Minimize the variability/uncertainty of state specific audits
  + Form document to monitor what is going on
* What are states doing to help growers meet their market access requirements

FSOP Buyer Handbook Funding

* Received Food Safety Grant to develop a handbook of produce safety standards for buyers. I.e. provide resources of what specific state audits require.
* Provide an online handbook based on specific produce safety primarily for buyers, but accessible to growers so they have more information for available buying options based on specific produce safety factors like relevant state and federal standards.
* What are driving the buyer decision making points towards growers and if the state is covering the buyer interests of receiving safe food.
* What are growers thinking when they are communicating with buyers on these matters

Project’s objectives/activities

* Extend results through education and outreach
* Evaluate and assess progress and impact

Audience comment:

* When given options of resources (this handbook and already provided content) another factor in buyer’s investigation of resources will be based on relationship. Concern of the online handbook adding confusion and redundant for the states that already have resources.
* Rebuttal is that though some states do have great resources this handbook is to provide a universal source of resources. USDA investigating reasoning for buyer decision making: what do they decide, how are they discussing this, what resources did they use, why did they make the decision?

*Introductions and Discussion: thoughts/changes/additions to summary of 2019 meeting? by Hans Estrin (University of Vermont Extension)*

Dealt with interchange buying/selling between buyer and grower?

* Many have experienced it but ideally it is for everyone to experience it.

Audience intros:

* Buyers audit and dictate which audits growers buy though it feels frustrating for on-boarding process, few unnecessary, and not seeing food safety application in auditor’s form buyers. Why does it have to be hard and tense to provide safe food for buyers (umbrella tension)?
* Lots of New England states have developed their own audits. Many are good, learning curve for buyers and changing (i.e. VT removed gap audit and buyers had to address to growers of this update and alternative audits)
* Growers coming with feedback on not knowing differences of PC rules (regulations) and audit rules (FSMA) on food safety rules. Then buyers are asking growers to satisfy both types of rulings.

*Developing a Handbook of Produce Safety Standards for Buyers by Elizabeth Newbold & Hans Estrin (University of Vermont Extension)*

Why do it?

* To provide a collaborative tool to provide both common (FSMA) and specific/different knowledge of state audits for buyers in the Northeast region. With lapping changes of food safety regulations

The prizing trend to keep an eye on:

* Consumers long for fresh local, taste, nutrition, a food story, connection (with farmer), vibrancy, and MEANING

Guiding questions

* Who are we serving? How? What are the contents? What should the online handbook look online?
* Longevity - how is it sourced maintained?

5 yr out goal

* Better access and resolution for producing safety understanding of both state and federal audit programs for buyers.

*Vermont Produce Program: Buyer Outreach Initiative by Gina Clithero & Kristina Sweet (VT Agency of Agriculture)*

**Project Overview**: Started in august 2019 to develop and strengthen relationships between buyers and produce growers in Vermont through information gathering and reaching out to buyers.

* Approach reaching at any produce purchasing entity. Provided factsheets

Goals

* Establish and build relationships with buyers of Vt. produce
* Awareness of CAPs program

Planning

* Current scope (Vt state)
* Buyer contact list (buyers, distributors, food hub, grower)
* Standard questions (for 30 min calls)
* Buyer factsheet (sent to buyers that were contacted)
* Develop initial outreach email (inform buyer of project and address any questions of produce safety requirements

Results

* Outreach letters and factsheets sent to contacts
* Scheduled 30 min call meeting (effective time interval)
* Post meeting follow-ups
* Produce safety discussions
* Duration aug 2019 - nov 2019
* 20 buyers contacted

Impact summary

* Improved understanding of VT produce buyer procurement processed and safety requirements (what practices are taking place?)
* Positive feedback from produce buyers
  + small buyers with min requirements, alternative certifications satisfy with buyers (organic)
* Produce buyers had questions on FSMA produce safety rule
* Learned of limits of this project to improve for the continuation of future outreach project (contact multiple reps from business, inform buyers of this outreach’s purpose, understand state/fed info
* Build out VT produce buyer contact list (form a network)
* Host meetings with buyers
* Outreach to additional buyer categories (restaurants, independent retail stores)
* Collaborate with buyers to share produce safety info/resources with growers
* Attend regional trade shows
* Help ensure buyers and growers have general knowledge of FSMA
* Explain VT state requirements
* VT farms are being active about produce safety rules

Question:

* Include of preventive controls on processing parameters?
* No, it did not include PC because they focused on producing safety rules (no processing). Maybe collaboration with VT dept health on that focus.

*Development of State Implementation Matrix by Sedona Chavez (Center for Ag and Food Systems at Vermont Law School)*

Legal services initiative project of state implementation

* Info gather on how states are implementing the produce safety rule, especially on their own authority

Research process

* Online search for statutes and regulations in state-enforced, non-credentialed states
* Direct outreach to states

Common variations in State Law:

* Inspections
  + Time, required/voluntary inspections reports, specification of inspections, Dept entrance and inspection of farms conducting covered activity or produce farms
* Penalties and fines
* Records
* Commissioner/secretary/state shall or may adopt rules?
* Subsequent amendments to or editions of the Federal Rule also adopted

*Break-up: Buyer and Educator/Regulator small groups*

*Buyer Break-out by Hans Estrin (University of Vermont Extension) & Wes Kline (Rutgers University)*

Summary: to discuss and share in the buyer perspective

Does this handbook make sense?

* For buyers in states with little resources or within multiple states it does. For buyers in supportive states it’s a nice addition
* Does not want information to be in just regulator jargon. Use layman’s terms to make it as easy to understand as possible.
* See the tool to inform the distributors that they don’t need to use unnecessary audits because of inflexibility and lack of understanding audits (Ex: if a big chain does one type of audit than others see it as the standard; domino effect).
* Some members work on forming a relationship with growers before being focused on regulating because that connection becomes a mutual resource.
* Got to have the regulation to back up the process and connection between growers and buyers.
* Reformat a reference document of what regulatory statutes, acronyms, and other jargon be easily accessible for buyers.
* Don’t just put the regulatory numbers
* The handbook matrix will take individual states into account.
* For inspection on buyers is it just reviewing audits or inspecting the farm on-site. Past experience that seeing the visual in practice can provide more. Not a universally shared belief. How can that initiative be shared with other buyers?

How can it be done proactively? Improve connections between buyers and growers?

* An opening in the book to cover soft skills for buyers like how to build relationships with growers?
* But how are the interactions when dealing with a less than adequate farmer implementing food safety plans. That can be why regulations are needed (when the firm hand is needed).

Smaller aggregators and coops

* A gap audit seems appropriate for small size buyers with good farms. Yet customers are asking for requirements that buyers have to implement onto the farms just because of stakeholders (customer)
* Have open communications with farms and small buyers. However, a gap is the current policy because of the lack of representatives to visit the farms on-site.
* Institutions are not accepting distributions that have no required audits due to their consumers (children, elderly, liability, etc.). From USDA, lots of states and farm schools have written gap programs then the process becomes complicated when the fresh produce becomes processed produce.

Handbook form suggestions/ideas:

* Addressing listing buyers adds the option of having buyer contact information (not buyer’s policy) released and on site. But go with caution that it can lead to a trickle back down form mainly large scale auditor’s affection smaller auditors. Educate buyers to make their own decision.
* Next steps: Next two years need lead advisors to help develop this process

*Educator/Regulator Break-out by Elizabeth Newbold (University of Vermont Extension)*

Challenges for growers:

1. create a consistent vocabulary and terminology
2. Elements within traceability
3. Cost additionally associated with compliance, audits, material, and training
4. Audit and inspection: required and optional. Better education of different categories for farmers and let them decide.
5. Describe a controlled environment HACCP applying to a farm and a processing facility?

Education/Outreach:

1. CT: Buyer Program: overview of product safety, open discussion panel for buyers, develop buyer awareness of the regulation, develop a buyers’ list and follow up with the attendees of the program
2. MA: Buyer conference, talk about the expectation and perspectives, update buyer’s knowledge, create a bridge between grower and buyer. Program contact non available for buyer to reach out?
3. How can we use the handbook to assist the buyers throughout the process?