Vermont Produce Program
Buyer Outreach Initiative

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Overview

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM) believes that developing relationships and increasing collaboration with buyers of produce will more holistically support produce farms and aid in the implementation of the Produce Safety Rule.
Vermont’s Approach

• VAAFM Produce Program launched a Buyer Outreach Initiative in August 2019

• VAAFM prioritized reaching produce distributors, aggregators (e.g. food hubs), local retailers (e.g. food cooperatives), and food service management companies

• We provided factsheets and other information and scheduled 30-minute calls with buyers
Project Goals

1. Establish and build relationships with buyers of Vermont fruits and vegetables.
2. Support buyers in understanding the FSMA Produce Safety Rule.
3. Understand what produce safety standards are required of Vermont produce suppliers.
4. Build increased awareness of the CAPS program.

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Planning

1. Determine project scope.
2. Build a buyer contact list.
3. Establish standard outreach questions.
4. Develop a buyer factsheet.
5. Develop an initial outreach email.
Scheduling & Execution

1. Send outreach letter and factsheet to contacts.
2. Schedule meetings in 30-minute increments.
3. Staff conference calls.
4. Follow-up after the meeting.
Outcomes

RESULTS, LESSONS LEARNED & NEXT STEPS
Produce Safety Discussions

- August 2019 - November 2019
- 20 meetings with produce buyers representing various business models
- Follow-up emails sent to all buyers with additional information
- Materials developed:
  - Initial Outreach Letter
  - Meeting questions
  - FSMA PSR Factsheet for Buyers

Produce Buyer Business Type

- Retailer: 8
- Distributor: 5
- Aggregator: 1
- Food Service Management Company: 4
- Foodbank: 2

Legend:
- Retailer
- Distributor
- Aggregator
- Food Service Management Company
- Foodbank
Impact Summary

• Improved understanding within VAAFM of VT produce buyer procurement processes and produce safety requirements

• Positive feedback from produce buyers

• Increased industry knowledge surrounding the PSR and voluntary food safety audit programs

• Addressed questions and assumptions
How does the FSMA Produce Safety Rule apply to my operation?

Can buyers obtain a farm’s inspection form?

If there were red flags during an inspection, will the state share results with buyers?

Can a farm continue to operate if they receive an observation during an inspection?

What is the difference between a food safety audit and a Produce Safety Rule inspection? Can any produce farm request an inspection?

Is there anything we need to do, or can do, to support this effort?

How much of the State’s efforts with the FSMA Produce Safety Rule are educationally focused?
Lessons Learned

• Set realistic expectations.

• Consider asking multiple representatives from one business to join the meeting.

• Assure buyers that outreach is for educational purposes, not regulatory.

• Understand state/federal information sharing restrictions.
Next Steps for Vermont

1. Continue to build VT produce buyer contact list.
2. Continue to host meetings with buyers from target outreach categories.
3. Conduct outreach to additional buyer categories.
4. Collaborate with buyers to communicate produce safety information and resources to growers.
5. Attend regional trade shows and buyer-focused events to share resources and answer questions.
6. Partner with buyers to host Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Courses.
How can outreach to buyers strengthen state produce safety programs?

1. Help ensure buyers and growers have the same general knowledge of the FSMA Produce Safety Rule to reduce confusion and/or uncertainty in the marketplace.

2. Explain the role of state produce programs in implementing the Produce Safety Rule.

3. Understand buyer requirements to better support produce farms in the marketplace.

4. Increase the number of outlets for state produce safety program information sharing.
Resources

• Materials at your table
  1. Produce Buyer Outreach Initiative Publication
  2. Standard Outreach Questions
  3. Initial Outreach Letter
  4. FSMA Produce Safety Rule Buyer Factsheet
Questions?

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