

Regional trainings prepare Idaho produce farmers for federal food safety regulations

AT A GLANCE

Across Idaho, 229 fresh produce farmers, industry professionals and Extension educators complete the first step toward meeting requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule.

The Situation

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law in 2011 and is the largest overhaul of food safety standards in the United States since 1938. The new federal regulation granted the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authority to regulate food safety across multiple segments of the industry including fresh produce, food manufacturing, animal food, transportation and imported food.

Within the produce industry, farms with average annual food sales of \$500,000 or more were required to comply with new standards beginning in January 2018 with regulatory visits for those farms set to begin in 2019. Compliance dates for smaller produce farms will be staggered over the next few years.

Based on National Agricultural Statistics Service data, Idaho has more than 200 farms likely covered by Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule regulations. The rule requires that at least one supervisor from each operation complete FDA approved training. The only approved standardized curriculum at this time is from the Produce Safety Alliance associated with Cornell University.



FMSA produce safety training in Moscow, Idaho, February 2018. Photo credit: Colette DePhelps.

Our Response

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) secured funding from FDA in 2016 and partnered with University of Idaho to provide education, outreach and technical assistance to Idaho growers in preparation for implementation of the Produce Safety Rule.

Three University of Idaho Extension educators, one specialist and two ISDA employees attended workshops and became certified as Produce Safety Alliance trainers qualified to deliver grower trainings statewide.

Eight trainings were held in Idaho Falls, Twin Falls, Caldwell (2), Payette, Boise, Post Falls and Moscow. Trainings were scheduled November 2017 to February 2018 to avoid conflict with the growing season.

Marketing for trainings was conducted through commodity groups, grower associations, Extension mailing lists and personal contacts at meetings and outreach events. Trainings were eight hours long, covering seven modules. Each participant received a 378-page training manual (Spanish language manual available upon request), a USB drive with course materials, several supplemental handouts, and a completion certificate, all provided through grant funding.

Participants included farmers, farm food safety managers, ag service professionals, Extension educators, commodity group representatives and ISDA fruit and vegetable inspectors. There were 229 certificates issued for successful completion of the training.

Program Outcomes

An evaluation of the standardized curriculum developed by the Produce Safety Alliance was given to each participant. Of the 239 total participants, 168 completed the voluntary evaluation (70 percent response rate). For 62 percent of participants this was their first produce safety training. Most workshop participants (54 percent) were farm owners/operators, 20 percent were farm workers or in some capacity served the produce industry, and just under 10 percent were government employees and Extension educators.

Approximately 72 percent of the producers and farm workers who attended the trainings grew produce covered by the FMSA Produce Safety Rule (Table 1), and 42 percent also grew produce crops not covered by the rule. About 45 percent of producer participants had annual produce sales below \$25,000, making them exempt from the rule.

After participating in the trainings, most participants understood if their farming operation was subject to all, part or none of the FMSA Produce Safety Rule, with 31 percent being unsure.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Rebecca Mills, Extension Educator, University of Idaho Extension, Gem County, 208-365-6363, rmills@uidaho.edu

Ariel Agenbroad, Area Extension Educator, University of Idaho Extension, Ada County, 208-287-5900, ariel@uidaho.edu

Colette DePhelps, Area Extension Educator, University of Idaho Extension, Northern District, 208-885-4003, cdephelps@uidaho.edu

Jang Ho Kim, Extension Food Safety Specialist, University of Idaho, 208-885-6972, janghok@uidaho.edu

20-19-rmills-fsma • 5/19

Slightly more than half of respondents (56 percent) indicated they had a farm food safety plan in place. Of the 64 participants without a plan, 44 indicated they intended to write a food safety plan after the training.

Most participants (96 percent) felt the instruction they received by attending the training was sufficient to help them implement regulatory requirements.

Table 1: Produce grown by participants in 2018 Idaho Produce Safety Alliance trainings.

Produce Type	Number of Producers	Percent of Producers
Leafy Greens	26	13%
Vegetables, mixed	74	37%
Tree fruit	21	10%
Berries	18	9%
Peanuts/treenuts	4	2%
Other	56	28%

The Future

Trainings will continue to be offered in late 2018-early 2019. Farms who have participated in a Produce Safety Alliance training have the option to participate in an On-Farm Readiness Review (OFRR). The goal of an OFRR is to help the produce industry professional gauge their readiness for a regulatory visit. There are currently three University of Idaho Extension professionals and two ISDA professionals trained to conduct an OFRR in Idaho.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

University of Idaho: Barbara Rasco, Helen Joyner.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture: Pamela Juker, Brigitta Gruenberg, Jaclyn Evans.