

Fruit and Vegetable Growers Food Safety Program Survey Results

Background:

NC Cooperative Extension at the Plants for Human Health Institute with the NC Fresh Produce Safety Task Force is developing a tool that will assist fruit and vegetable growers in creating a food safety program, and more specifically a food safety plan for their operation. In order to ensure this tool is as user friendly as possible it is essential to get grower feedback upfront.

Objective:

The purpose of this survey is to determine the needs of fruit and vegetable growers in North Carolina as related to creating food safety plans for their operation.

Data collection:

The survey was available online during November 2012 and was made available to the following listserves: NC Fresh Produce Safety, Fresh Produce Safety Tier 2, and NC Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. The survey was also available at the 2012 Southeast Strawberry Expo Food Safety Risk Identification workshop on November 7, 2012. In total, there were 38 respondents.

Demographic Information:

The majority of the respondents, over 67 percent, identified themselves as farm owners and 63 percent were over the age of 45. Seventy-five percent of the respondents were growers. Sixty percent had small operations with total gross sales of less than \$100,000 with the largest percentage of sales going directly to consumers.

Findings:

Food Safety Plans: Respondents were almost evenly split when it came to having a food safety plan, with 53 percent reporting they currently had one in place and 47 percent indicating they did not have food safety plan in place. Of those that currently had a food safety plan most indicated they created the plans using information found online, 23 percent of responses, and information received from face-to-face training, 28 percent of responses. Those that did not have a food safety plan in place reported a variety of reasons for not creating one. These reasons included: not knowing how to create a food safety plan, not having the time to create a food safety plan, and not creating a food safety plan because it is not a requirement at this time. When asked which third party auditor they might use if planning to become GAPs certified, 35 percent indicated that they were not currently looking into GAPs certification while 27 percent chose USDA.

Technology and Web Access: When asked to define their computer and web connectivity almost 87 percent indicated that they had access to a computer and high-speed Internet. Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed indicated they would be most interested in creating food safety plans using a combination of online resource

tools and sample paper copies.

Conclusions:

The Fruit and Vegetable Growers Food Safety Survey results reveal the respondents are small farmers who sell a large percentage of their crop directly to consumers, receive their information on food safety plans from online resources and face-to-face training, have access to high speed Internet, and want to utilize both online resources and paper copies to create a food safety plan.

Recommendations:

Based on survey results, it is recommended the project move forward to create a web-based resource to help farmers create food safety plans. The resource should focus on simplifying the process of creating a food safety plan in order to reduce confusion and limit time spent creating the plan. This resource is likely to be most effective if combined with face-to-face trainings.