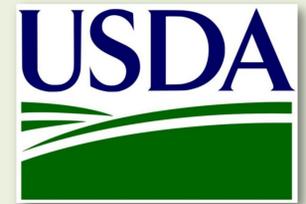


# Training Missouri Small Farmers on Good Agricultural Practices:

## GAPs / Food Safety Plan Writing Workshops



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**INTRODUCTION.** Food safety is on the minds of Missouri's farmers. With the passage of the FDA's Food Safety Modernization Act in 2010 and subsequent proposed Produce Safety Rule in 2013, growers of fresh fruits and vegetables will be subject to the first ever mandatory regulation of fresh produce. While some small farms may be exempt from the proposed Produce Safety Rule, ultimately buyers of produce can set higher expectations, including the requirement to participate in third-party audits to verify food safety practices on the farm. Growers with annual produce sales of less than \$25,000 will be exempt from the regulation. In addition, some growers may fall under the 'qualified exemption' (i.e. Tester Amendment) based on average annual gross sales of all food products of < \$500,000 AND selling more than 50% of those food products to a 'qualified end user' which can be defined as direct to the consumer or to a retail food establishment where produce is grown in the same state or within 275 miles. The regulation currently includes basic good agricultural practices, including water quality standards, worker training, soil amendment requirements, and sanitation and handling requirements for whole raw agricultural produce commodities. The final Produce Safety Rule is due to be published in the Federal Register by October 2015.

**HANDS-ON WORKSHOPS.** The participant's farm size varied, with some as small as \$ 1,000 in gross income and others exceeding \$100,000. Except for one tobacco farmer, all participants grew fruits and vegetables. The first two workshops were taught by Dr. Elizabeth Bihn and Ms. Gretchen Wall of Cornell University and the Produce Safety Alliance who traveled from New York State to lead the trainings. The third training was held for Hmong growers in the Joplin area and was taught by Michele Schermann and Pa Lee Yang of the University of Minnesota. The fourth and final workshop was taught by LUCE and MU extension staff that had attended one of the two previous workshops taught by Cornell faculty. Mr. Douglas Goodson, a USDA GAPs auditor presented on his role and what the farmer can expect during the on farm visit and audit. All of the workshops were formatted similarly. Day one consisted of an overview of all aspects of GAP certification requirements including:

- Water testing guidelines
- Compost and manure application
- Livestock management
- Produce harvesting, washing, product handling
- Product tracking (traceability) and recording keeping
- Working with an auditor

On day two the group wrote customized food safety plans following the templates supplied by Cornell University. Every farmer present had access to a laptop computer during the workshop. The computers were either brought by the farmer or supplied by Lincoln University. By the end of the second day all workshop attendees had an excellent start on their food safety plan.

**CONCLUSIONS.** Most farmers reported that they will not pay for GAP certification until they are mandated by law; however those who are required by buyers to have a written food safety plan or GAP certification as a requirement for sales are moving ahead with the process. Some of the reasons they gave for attending the training and completing the food safety plan include:

- "To keep me safe from a lawsuit!"
- "I want to know I am doing everything possible to provide safe food to my customers."
- "We run a training program for adults on our not for profit urban farm. They need to know how to farm correctly."
- "It is just good business."

Farmers expressed concern about the following aspects of the certification requirements and requested additional discussion. At times the conversation became lively when some farmers thought the requirements were too burdensome. These topics included:

- Frequency of water testing guidelines
- Timing of compost and manure applications
- Keeping wildlife out of fields
- Storage temperature requirements
- Creation of product lots
- Record keeping

Staff gave these topics extra time during the training so everyone could understand how to best meet the requirements and understand the consequences of not meeting them.

Trainings of this kind will need to continue with greater frequency as GAP certification becomes necessary for most farmers. The two-day workshop with an emphasis on writing the food safety plan format worked well as a model and is recommended.

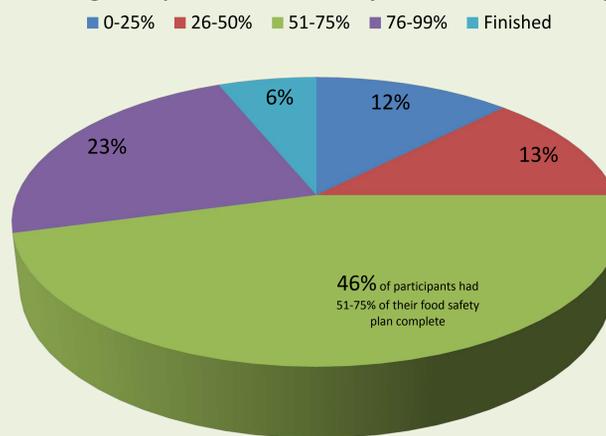


Nahshon Bishop Teaching on the Food Safety Modernization Act at the Kansas City Workshop

**OBJECTIVES.** Small-scale farmers, such as those served by Lincoln University Cooperative Extension (LUCE), have many questions about the law and how it will affect them. One point of concern for many farmers is the completion of a written food safety plan, which is an integral part of GAP certification. LUCE staff determined that a comprehensive training with a focus on writing a farm food safety plan would serve our small farm clients. Even if they don't need apply for GAP certification at this point, a written food safety plan puts procedures in place for the proper growing and handling of produce, and provides a plan of action if a food borne illness outbreak occurs.

To this end, LUCE Small Farm Specialists Katie Nixon (Kansas City), Nahshon Bishop (Joplin) and Miranda Duschack (St. Louis) each held two-day trainings on Good Agricultural Practices. The first three were held in the fall of 2013 (one in St. Louis, followed by two in Joplin), and the final was in Kansas City in the spring of 2014.

Percentage Completion of Food Safety Plans at the end of Day 2



**IMPACT.** A total of 134 farmers, representing 84 farms, attended the four trainings. Of those attendees 23 were minorities, and 17 were female sole proprietors. At the conclusion of day two 75% of participants from all four workshops were at least halfway to completing their food safety plan. Three participants reported completing the food safety plan at the end of day two. A year after the workshop 14 farms had completed food safety plans. Of the farmers with completed food safety plans four are not-for-profit farming projects. A total of four farms have already received GAP certification.



Dr. Bihn Teaching on the food safety water use practices at the Workshop in St. Louis

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<http://www.lincolnu.edu/web/programs-and-projects/innovative-small-farmers-outreach-program>