

On-Farm Food Safety Workshop-2013

FINAL REPORT

Project Summary

In order to enhance the competitiveness of Alaska Grown specialty crops, the Division has hosted on-farm food safety workshops in different regions of the State. When possible, workshops included a mock Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audits to help producers understand the requirements. As a result of attending one of these workshops, specialty crop producers increased confidence preparing them for access to more markets such as selling to restaurants, schools and other institutions that have stricter food safety requirements.

Project Approach

Workshops were scheduled as requested by regions and/or farm events. The project assistant promoted the availability of the workshops through direct outreach to farmer's market managers, Cooperative Extension Service Agents, newsletter articles, and through posts in industry Facebook groups. The project assistant scheduled a workshop after at least five specialty crop producers committed to attending. While our workshops requests were infrequent, we were able to meet community needs in all instances as well as an individual consult to a community that only had one producer.

Workbooks and other materials were purchased in bulk to reduce shipping costs.

Goals & Outcomes Achieved

We are going to aggregate our pre-post survey results from the previously funded project since we used the same measuring tool. Our original pre-post survey used in the pilot phase of the our On-Farm Food Safety Workshops was modified so those responses are not included. With the pilot participants included this program reached 147 producers; this data reflects the 113 producers that completed the exact same survey before and after the workshop. Out of all the participants 88.5% identified themselves as one of the following: farmer, hobby farmer, home gardener, or greenhouse owner. Over 80% of the participants reported selling product at a farmer's market, CSA's, and/or restaurants.

Goal: To increase specialty crop producers' knowledge of GAP and other on-farm food safety requirements through participation in a regional on-farm food safety workshop.

Specialty Crop producer's knowledge of GAP and other on-farm food safety requirements was significantly increased through participation in our regional on-farm food safety workshop classes.

Benchmark: Specialty crop producers' knowledge prior to attending the workshop will be measured through a pre-workshop survey.

Using a self-reported rating scale on level of knowledge the pre-survey results found a total score of 302 with an average rating of 2.88 from participant's data.

Performance Measure: Increase in on-farm food safety knowledge measured by pre- and post-workshop surveys.

Using a self-reported rating scale on level of knowledge the pre-survey results found a total score of 419 with an average rating of 3.92 from participant's data.

Target: 50% increase in knowledge regarding GAP and other on-farm food safety requirements due to attending an on-farm food safety workshop.

There was a 39% increase in the overall knowledge score from the pre/post data and 67% of the workshop participants showed an increase in knowledge of some sort. Since the scale was only 1-5 we believe the statistical results are a better measure of showing an increase in knowledge and are pleased to see those results affirming the change in knowledge.

We ran a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test to look for a significant difference between the pre-post test results. Using a two-tailed hypothesis and testing for the 0.01 significance level we found that there was a significant difference in the participants self-reported measure of their knowledge of GAP and other farm food safety practices as a result of their attendance at our workshops. The z-value is -6.0146 with a p value of 0; the result is significant as $p \leq 0.01$.

Our goals for this project were fully achieved.

Beneficiaries

A total of 4 workshops were offered in this grant cycle with 50 people in attendance. Since this project built off previous funding, we want to note that in total the On Farm Food Safety Workshops reached 12 communities and 147 people in attendance. We also completed a community presentation and a community consult with no pre-post assessment; those two additions reached a total of two communities and 35 people.

Lessons Learned

With the loss of the project assistant and the evolution of the Food Safety Modernization Act, this project was difficult to complete as intended. As a solution we were able to offer a modified version of basic farm food safety practices and point growers to proper experts as needed. Another challenge was getting enough interested producers in very small communities. To address this challenge, we tried offering a "community food safety consultation" and had tremendous success. This was tested out with our Farm to School program to see if a community consultation would have value and we were extremely encouraged by the experience.

Additional Information

There were additional findings worth noting. While there was an increase in knowledge for all topic areas, we saw a 46% increase in knowledge about tool, equipment, and harvesting container sanitation and a 40% increase in worker hygiene practices. The remaining topic areas showed a % increase between 27% and 34%. This could mean we need to simplify or spend more time on the other content areas of the workshop, another interpretation is that those lower scoring topic areas may not be as relevant to the growers who attended our workshops. Either interpretation hints that we could offer different types of workshops to more appropriately tailor the content to participants.

When asked to check the components that impacted food safety on a farm eight components scored below a 95% accuracy on the pre-test and all components scored 95% accuracy or better on the post-test. The four that fell below 90% accuracy on the pre-test were: water irrigation method, compost temperature, fertilizer storage, and equipment maintenance. These results tell us that there are four areas for potential risk and our workshop addresses those areas successfully.

Based off the post survey responses 38% of the participants either plan to get a GAP audit or are still thinking about it and 70% plan to do a self-audit. Over half the participants plan to write a food safety plan, 77% intend to make changes to farm food safety practices, and the two most common safety practices respondents plan to make are washing hands more often and cleaning/sanitizing containers and food contact surfaces more often.

Finally, we are pleased to report that more than 95% of the participants responded that the workshops either provided just the right amount of information or a lot of information but they would benefit from it.