

## How Will New Food Safety Rules Impact Your PYO and Pre-Picked Markets?

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Spoiler Alert! The answer to the question that is the title of this talk is...It depends! If that is all you needed to know feel free to attend a different session, but if you are interested in produce safety, the impact upcoming regulation might have, and how you can manage food safety practices on your farm to stay competitive, then this is the session for you. Below is a summary of some of the things that have impacted produce safety and the implementation of food safety practices on farms. Some farmers feel that food safety practices are not necessary on their farms or feel they will not be impacted by regulation because their operations are too small. This session will address these notions and lots of other produce safety issues.

In 1998, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) published the *Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* that outlined Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and their importance to fresh produce safety. Over the past thirteen years, fresh produce growers have been motivated to adopt formal food safety practices such as GAPs mostly because wholesale buyers have demanded it. Consumers who buy directly from farms have been less demanding about understanding and verifying the farms food safety practices, so farms that direct market have been less likely to embrace a formal food safety program. This does not mean that small farms are less safe, since the only way to determine this is to understand food safety risks and evaluate farm practices with these risks in mind. It does mean that many small farm owners have not taken the time to review their farm practices to determine the impact they have on safety. This is a concern because farms could be using practices that are risky with no intention to understand or address the food safety risks. As food producers, all farmers should have a basic understanding of food safety and be willing to assess their practices to assure they are doing what they can to produce safe food.

On January 4, 2011, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law by President Obama. The US FDA is scheduled to release a draft produce safety regulation early in 2012. Prior to this regulation, fresh produce has not been regulated for safety. Guidance from the FDA, such as the *Guide* mentioned above, has been voluntary. Looming federal regulation as well as changes within the produce industry has resulted in many growers reviewing their need to be engaged in produce safety. A subject of much discussion for small farm owners is the Tester Amendment included in the FSMA. Understanding how the Tester Amendment may impact farms is important for all fresh produce farm owners. Whether it is produce safety regulations or produce-associate foodborne illnesses, fresh produce growers should understand the implications and how they affect their operations.

The newly formed Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) is funded by the FDA and the United States Department of Agriculture to provide fundamental, science-based, on-farm food safety knowledge to fresh fruit and vegetable farmers with an emphasis on small scale operations. The PSA is developing a nation-wide food safety curriculum to help produce growers understand and implement food safety practices such as GAPs as well as prepare for the upcoming FDA regulation. Those interested in produce safety can join the working committees or simply sign up for the general listserv to stay informed of PSA activities at

[www.producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu](http://www.producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu). Participation in the PSA is one way for farmers to stay informed and prepared for the new regulation.

Pick Your Own (PYO) and pre-picked markets often straddle the line between direct and wholesale markets resulting in different pressure and requirement to adopt food safety practices. PYO operations usually function as direct markets. Customers come to the farm, pick the product, pay the farmer, and go home. Pre-picked markets also can be direct to consumer, with the farmer harvesting the commodities and selling them directly to the customer, but this is not always the case. Some pre-picked markets do sell to local retailers such as grocery stores interested in providing “locally grown” products. Some farms provide both PYO and Pre-Picked options, so they may serve both direct and wholesale markets. This may impact their need/desire to implement food safety practices and may even complicate the process. This workshop will discuss regulatory issues, changes in industry expectations, and how PYO and Pre-Picked Markets can address their produce safety needs. Knowledge is power and understanding the changing landscape of produce safety will help growers successfully navigate and implement practices that make sense for them and their markets.