

[0:00]

Maggie: Welcome to the Young Farmers Food Safety Focus Group series. I'm Maggie Kaiser, the produce safety training coordinator for the National Young Farmers Coalition. Throughout the summer of 2020, I, along with Bre Sliker, Billy Mitchell and Farmer Facilitators from across the country, hosted a series of focus groups with farmers, where we discussed the challenges and successes of implementing various on farm produce safety practices and we recorded them because we want these conversations to be a resource for you. In every session we bring together farmers with similar experiences for a discussion about a specific farm food safety topic, we begin each one with a farmer presentation, followed by a roundtable discussion where farmers share problems and solutions with one another. We hope you enjoy them and find some practical information for your farm.

[music]

[1:02]

Maggie: Welcome, great. My name is Maggie Kaiser and I'm the produce safety training coordinator for the National Young Farmers Coalition, and I'm also a farmer in New Orleans and one of the organizers for our local chapter of the Coalition. Y'all are here today to participate in the focus group, which we're calling scaling up produce safety practices with your farm operation. We'll be hearing from Scott Chang Fleeman of Shaoshan Farm in California. So, I will go around and do some introductions now. I think we'll start with the organizers of this focus group, so I will pass it to you first Billy.

[1:44]

Billy: Hey all, my name is Billy Mitchell. I live in Georgia down the coast in Brunswick, GA and I'm the FISMA, food and safety modernization act, training coordinator for the National Farmers Union, which means I get to go around the country teaching food safety, learning about food safety, seeing the challenges and the solutions that different farmers are coming up with. Before this, I did a good and sometimes a pretty bad job managing a couple of small-scale diversified vegetable farms.

[2:15]

Rachel: Hi, I'm Rachel. I run Bad Weather Farm which is an urban micro farm in Seattle, WA and we do a diversified vegetable and have a pretty rapidly growing cut flower program, as well as chickens and ducks for egg production. I'll pass it off to Grayson.

[2:34]

Grayson: Hi folks, I'm Grayson and my pronouns are they/them as well as he/him. I am located in right now very sunny Eatonville, WA. I own and run a small farm out here. We do a few acres of vegetables, have a flock of sheep and then a couple of blocks of laying hands.

[2:57]

Maggie: Grayson, will you invite the next person to introduce themselves?

[3:00]

Grayson: Yeah, let's pass it to Anne, you're below me.

[3:05]

Anne: I'm Anne and the name of our farm is HighEnergy. We're near Tucson, AZ in Marana specifically. We do have goats on the property and grow lots of different vegetables year-round. I am always happy to be a farmer.

[3:24]

Maggie: Thanks Anne, will you invite the next person?

[3:27]

Anne: That would be Andrea.

[3:30]

Andrea: I'm Andrea David Sitina and I have a quarter acre farm. I'm on the Eastern Shore of Maryland where it is extremely hot. I grow mixed vegetables, certified organic and seedlings for the farmers market customers. I'll pass it to the person that's on the phone.

[3:54]

Jade: Oh, that's me. I don't have zoom, so that's why you can't see me, sorry. My name is Jade Soto. I farm in Colorado. I'm the owner of Minoro Farm and it's our first season so I am just curious to listen to everything you all have to say. I've got more questions than I have answers. Glad to be here.

[4:17]

Maggie: Well, that's everyone well, I guess except for Scott, but I think that he'll do it more in depth introduction of himself and his farm. Yeah, why don't we pass it to Scott?

[4:32]

Scott: Alright, here we go. Is the screen sharing? Alright, so my name is Scott Chang Fleeman and my pronouns are he/him. I have a five and a half acre mixed vegetable farm in Marin County. We are about half a mile off the coast and about an hour North of San Francisco. So we grow predominantly Asian heritage vegetables and we're certified organic. We service primarily the Asian American community in the broader Bay Area as well as San Francisco, Marin County, Sonoma County, and a little bit of the Peninsula. Yeah, so here is just a really quick glance of our operation here. We're a mixed vegetable operation. We don't do any kind of livestock or any kind of value added. We're strictly vegetables. We focus in direct marketing, so we have a 65 member CSA that's predominantly Asian American folks. We have a community supported CSA of each other, so half of our members subsidize the other half's CSA membership and we do 2 farmers markets and we sell direct to chefs. We're a small scale farm, so we're only five and a half acres, of which we cultivate anywhere between four to five of those acres. Our sales are below \$500,000 a year, which puts us into one of the exempt categories for FISMA. We are small enough, and we do so much direct marketing that we do find ourselves in a lot of exemptions for food safety, but we do take food safety super seriously here. As we're getting larger and looking through the future of potentially expanding to 50 plus acres, we want to implement a lot of these good practices early on. So last year was our first year and there's a few things that we just put into place immediately. With food safety, I feel like a lot of the stuff that I think about is with the water, so we have Ag water and then we also have potable wash water. On our farm we irrigate entirely off of rainwater catchment from two reservoirs on the property. We lease land on a larger cattle ranch, so previously this reservoir was free range for the cattle to drink straight out of the reservoirs. The previous farmer actually used NRCS funding to fence in the reservoir and create a gravity fed trough system so that we can exclude the cattle from the reservoir so we can prevent any kind of contamination. I think in our first year it was a conscious decision, knowing that we use surface water to irrigate, to use only drip irrigation, which is a little bit lower risk for food safety because most of what we grow on our cold coastal climate is leafy greens. So, we focus on drip irrigation to minimize that risk. With our wash water, we use well water on the property, we're not on any kind of city water. So, we actually have an agreement with our landlords to do regular water testing to check for coliforms, and then we also have an agreement with our landlords to chlorinate our water to municipal levels just in case. I think that's something that, especially in our first year, is really important. It's important to have that written out either in your lease or in a separate agreement with your landlords to just have clarity that if you had a food safety issue come up. It had to do with the wash water. There's a paper trail of who's responsibility it was and where the gaps in responsibility were. In our first year, it was a one-person operation. It was just me farming on 2 1/2 acres and that is inherently a lot lower risk for food safety, because you don't

really have to deal with communicating any SOPs or communicating anything to employees. If I decided that I wanted to do something some way, I didn't have to say it, I just knew. I mean, I didn't really write anything down because I was the only one there. Like I mentioned, we also do a lot of direct marketing so we don't really work with any wholesale distributors right now or in our first year. So, the risk was really really low, because if there was any kind of an issue, I could just reach out directly to recall from the customers myself. So, now we're in year two. This is Abby in this photo, who is my first full time employee. We scaled up from 2 1/2 acres to four acres now in cultivation and as we scaled up the operation both in size and complexity, we're trying to scale up our food safety efforts as well. We have a written plan. It doesn't have to be anything super complex. That's down the line. We want to make it a little bit more official, but having any kind of written plan, I think really shows at least that your farm has the intention of having a strong focus on food safety. Just writing out the first thing you do when you come to the farm, just wash your hands, having that written out, I think is pretty important. This year we really built out our packing shed and I feel like a lot of food safety stuff happens in the washpack. Then the type of packaging we use comes into play and a lot of that's with COVID. We used to reuse a lot of wax boxes from grocery stores and now with COVID and just with the higher volume of produce that's going out, we have a little bit more focus on what type of packaging we're using, making sure that it's sanitized. We reuse boxes and things like that. Here's just some photos from our washpack shed just to show how simple it is. We just have a jug of water with a hand soap and paper towels, and it's the first thing when you show up, everybody knows, that's the first thing you do is wash your hands. I like this setup because also we will use it as a mobile wash hand wash station. We will just bring the jug of water and the soap and towels with us in the truck when we go out to harvest in the field so that way if anybody blows their nose or pees along the fence line, they can wash their hands. There's no real excuse for not being able to walk all the way back to the packing shed so it increases your efficiency as well. We try to set up some pretty simple systems. Something we were really concerned about were our reusable crates going out to market and coming back. It seems with COVID now, the surface contact transmission is a little bit less of an issue than people originally thought, but we put a lot of this into place when COVID was less predictable. So, we bring our van back from market and we treat anything that went out into the real world. We just assume it's contaminated. This is for COVID but also just any kind of food safety. Honestly, there's probably other bacteria and germs that are probably more higher risk through this contact surface stuff. We have it very clear that all of the dirty market returns come right out of the van that gets parked right here. So, it's super simple. We just unload and drop them right there. We don't have to walk them up somewhere else which would disincentivize us from putting them in the right place. Then all of these get washed out and sprayed with this bleach solution that's in a pump sprayer. So, we just try to make everything with our food safety as convenient and easy as possible to make sure that it actually happens. Then you can see on the other side they get stacked on that clean crate pallet, which is on the opposite side of the packing shed. So, it's really clear that the crate is dirty because it's on one side of the packing shed. If it's clean it's all the way on the other side, so the only way I would be able to get on the clean pallet is it went through the packing shed and got caught. During harvest, we sanitize our knives with that same bleach solution and make sure they're clean, obviously washing hands while we're working. This picture I'm wearing a mask which is not super necessary when you're actually out there. We actually started working in masks for two reasons. First of all, where we farm is really cold on the coast. It's super cold and windy and just found that I like it because my face would always get super cold in the morning with the ocean breeze so it's just more comfortable. With COVID safety aside, we found also that you're way less likely to just be touching your face and blowing your nose with a mask on. You're going to think about it before you touch your face or put something in your mouth. You have to think about it, so it just kind of creates that consciousness of preventing any face touching and produce touching. So that's what we do during harvest and then we have it written out in our plan as well. You know, if there's birdshit on a leaf like we just avoid that entire plant. Really writing things out so that there is no excuse for it. We don't just pick that leaf off and pick the plant anyway. We just avoid that and tend to just try to avoid that area. We also don't run the irrigation while we're harvesting, so there's no risk of contamination from pond water coming into produce and then we go to the post harvest packing shed, which is very simple. We have a spray table and we have a dunk tank. 99% of what we harvest we just spray. The dunk tank is really

only for if we have something that's exceptionally dirty or super buggy but we maybe used the wash tub once a month. The reason we chose spraying over dunking is that if you have a head of bok choy that has some bird shit or some bacteria on it and you throw it in the dunk tank with everything, you now have contamination where potentially everything got contaminated because of 1 bad product. So, we harvest into the wax boxes that we're going to distribute for sale or we harvest into those orange totes. Then all we do is spray them down so we don't actually advertise our produce as washed and we tell folks to wash it even though it ends up being fairly clean. We put that burden on the customer as long as it looks clean enough for us to bring to market. So pretty much we're cutting it, holding it in the field, putting it straight in the crate, spraying it down just to take the field heat out, and it goes in the cooler. Then the next person who touches it is the customer. So, that's post-harvest. This season went from being a 1 truck to a 2-truck farm last year. Before, I did everything with my little red Toyota. For most folks with small farms you have your farm truck, which is your delivery vehicle. It's your manure hauling vehicle and your personal vehicle, it's kind of everything, which is a nightmare for food safety. You can see in this picture, I was bringing the cover crop seed out but I've also got a jug of diesel in the back, which if that spilled would not be ideal. So, for food safety during transportation, we now have a designated delivery van and we don't put anything except for clean produce in there. The red truck is now the utility truck and my personal vehicle and when we actually do harvest into our red truck. All preprocessed produce gets harvested into the red truck and now we have a bed liner that gets sprayed down and sanitized before every harvest. Then all that produce gets semi washed afterwards. So that's during transportation. Then we get to market. Obviously, there's a lot of COVID stuff, which this isn't a presentation about COVID, but there's, basic stuff with food safety at market that COVID started, which is probably good. We have a market now that we run with two people on the produce handler and then one of my employees will be the cash handler so that way nobody is touching cash and then touching vegetables. So, I do all the shopping for everybody. Our customers start on the right side of the stand and then they work their way around and then they pay on the left side that way we only ever have 3 customers at a time. There's one person waiting on the right side, one person helping in the middle and one person paying on the other side, so everyone's at least 10 feet away from each other. We also have what we call our COVID wall of flowers in the front, where we put a bunch of crates in the front to get people to stand back even further because everyone was still touching the produce even with this blue rope up. So, we put crates in the front so nobody could touch the produce. We just decided to put all our flowers out there to make it look a little less intense. Yeah, and then food safety stuff at the market is just obvious stuff, you know, like if it falls on the ground, don't put it back on the display. We set up a trash and compost bins. We unload all of our produce onto a pallet. We bring a pallet of plastic out with us to offload before we set up the display and then all of our back stock produces in the orange toad in a plastic liner, but then we stack that into another one. It has a couple inch gap off of asphalt, so it's not just sitting on the gross streets of San Francisco. Then scaling up and looking towards next year, I actually just got an email from one of the wholesalers we're gonna start working with and they need a really well fleshed out food safety plan. So, we're gonna start working on that now. But really, for next year we're probably going to start working with at least one wholesale distributor, and we are laminating and posting these SOPs right now. Our crew is still super small, but next season we will probably have more employees, so just making sure that everything is really clearly labeled and then getting some sort of a rodent proof dry storage for our non refrigerated crops. So, that'll probably happen this fall when the winter squash comes in. We have a really great clean rodent proof cooler, but we don't really have room temperature storage for winter squash and shallots and things like that. Yeah, that's all I got.

[18:29]

Maggie: Cool, well we can open it up for questions and well we'll just go from there.

[18:37]

Anne: Do you not use any plastic bags or things like that for your vegetables?

[18:43]

Scott: Yeah, we do. Well, we use a plastic crate liner this season. We only use brand new wax boxes for any kind of grocery store or restaurant orders. In a brand new wax box we don't use a plastic liner because it's brand new, but if we are reusing a used plastic wax box, we will use a plastic liner in it. The reused wax boxes are CSA boxes and some customers bring them back to us. We have them sit on their own pallet for a week just in case there's anything on it and we just let time disinfect them. Anyways we use plastic bags. Yeah, we'll bag bok choy mainly but we don't say it's washed. It's not washed bagged greens, they're just in a bag so they're not loose.

[19:28]

Anne: We bag everything right now with the COVID. Yeah, our market requires that.

[19:34]

Scott: Yeah, they were requiring that, but then they backed off on that because it was just a little bit ridiculous. I can talk a little more about our market setup if people think that's interesting, because I feel like we actually have a really good COVID setup. So, essentially the way that our market setup works is, like I explained, we have our line that starts on one side and then I help the customers. The way that we try to cut down on packaging but also maintain food safety, is stocking those orange crates up and then we call those our customers shopping cart. So, while they tell me what they want, I load a harvest crate for them. Anything that needs to get weighed, I do bag and then I hand that to the assistant because to handle because he's not touching the produce directly, but anything that's loose, like a bunch, I'll just put it straight into that tote for the customer. We literally push the tote out. We kick it out 5 feet and then they can load their own reused bag. Then I move to the next customer. So, we make a shopping cart so then they can touch it, but they are only ever touching what they've already bought and they're not touching the whole display or breathing along everything.

[20:50]

Anne: Yeah, we are in Arizona. It's really hot even in the winter time it gets warm. We have to pack everything in ice. I don't like it but we have to bag everything.

[21:01]

Scott: Yeah, I mean we haven't broken 70 degrees yet here this summer so.

[21:06]

Grayson: I was wondering if you could say more about the cattle pond in your water. That's really interesting to me because I have some animals out here as well. Maybe repeat or go through the details of how you were thinking through how to make that safe.

[21:18]

Scott: Sure. So yeah, one of our parcels is located on a cattle ranch and we share the reservoir. It's the same water for irrigation as our landlord's cattle. Previously it had just been open to the cattle to come in and drink out directly out of the pond, but obviously there's concerns about manure running off into the water, and then any kind of bacteria, then getting pumped out of the pond and getting onto the leaves of the vegetables. So, using NRCS money, the previous farmer that I took over this parcel of land from, fenced out the entire pond so we have a perimeter fence that's barbed wire and keeps the cattle out. Then there's a big stock holding tank that, as we irrigate the field, it will refill that tank and then it just gravity feeds into a system of 10 or 12 troughs that are always full of water. That way at least we can keep the cattle out. Obviously, there's still a lot of concerns with using surface water. It's probably the riskiest form of water that you could use, a stagnant pond, because we can exclude the cattle, but we have 80 geese and ducks and birds and frogs, and everything's in there. So, we do our best to be able to keep the larger quantity of manure out from the cattle, but then that comes into your decisions around how you irrigate, right? So, we intentionally use drip irrigation because even if there was any kind of contaminant coming in, 99% of what we grow are leafy greens, is really low to the ground also,

so we need to make sure that we're preventing any kind of spray. With the drip, most of the time the plant leaves don't come into contact with the water itself. We use overhead wood. We also we plant in blocks. Yeah, we establish our crops on overhead for 10 days and then we transition everything to drip. So, we do have some aluminum sprinkler pipe, but we only establish these big blocks so that only the overhead reaches that block. Every week as we're moving down the field with the block, the overhead is moving, so when we're harvesting the most mature crop it's at the furthest point away from the overhead. Then there's other little things like clear labeling of our irrigation system where we do have risers that are potable water and then we have rises that are pond water and they're really clearly painted green or blue, blue for potable, green for pond, so that you're never wondering where this water is coming from.

[23:55]

Billy: A few other ways that NRCS can help with that too. It's hard to say it will ever be safe because it's unprotected, but definitely all those ways you're mitigating and lowering your risk help. NRCS will also help you put in filter strips or buffer strips around the pond, and so when it rains, those filter strips really will be another step to keep that water as clean as possible. Fencing them out can be hard, especially if you don't own the land, but it's definitely the first step. Just trying to keep them out of there because it's just so hard.

[24:31]

Scott: Yeah, something I also I forgot to mention in the slides but definitely think about starting your farm off on the right foot with food safety. We grow outside. Birds fly over and shit on the lettuce, it's just gonna happen. There's always a risk of food safety and contamination and problems with food safety. Aside from the systems you're putting in place to prevent and mitigate food safety, I think it's also important to put systems in place to protect yourself and to protect your business in the situation that there is a food safety problem. So, the first thing we did before I signed the lease, I incorporated as an LLC. If you're set up as a sole proprietor and you end up getting someone sick and you have an E. Coli outbreak and you get sued and you're just a sole proprietor, any of your personal assets, everything you own is up for up at risk. I own nothing on the farm but thinking ahead, ideally at some point I'll move into it. Maybe I'll have a draft that I don't use for the business that I want to keep, and if something ever happened, I wouldn't at least have to worry about my personal assets being lost to that. I think that's a big part of it. Also, with these things, having a written plan and communicating with your landlords about whose responsibility is what. I'm always thinking worst case scenario somebody could get sick and it could just happen. It happens all the time, and a lot of things are unpredictable, but if you show that you have done everything you can I think, would hopefully help you in court if you got sued.

[26:09]

Maggie: I will say that is not official legal advice, but I think you're getting there. You're on to something.

[26:18]

Scott: It can help you like sleep better at night.

[26:19]

Maggie: I think that that is a huge part of it, especially right now with COVID. How well are farmers sleeping at night? Yes, I wanted to ask, I'm curious about the agreement that you had with your landlord and did you borrow a template from somebody? Did you just write it up on your own? Did you have someone help you with it? And would you potentially be willing to share it? I think that is something that could be a useful tool for other farmers. We work with plenty of farmers who are leasing land and I think the more they know about how to protect themselves, especially in the documents that they're signing, the better.

[26:30]

Scott: Yeah, we don't have like a separate document. I just have it in an email like you will do this, this, this and this, and I will do this this and this. That was just an email correspondence with my landlords. The main thing that they stemmed out of was in the original lease on it, it says landlord shall provide potable water for washing vegetables. So that was the impetus of, OK, what does that mean and can we expand on that? For folks who are looking at leasing or opening a new lease, I'm in a California and Oregon nonprofit called Farm Link that drafted our lease thinking about all of those things like who's responsibility is the water and if the landlord says they're going to provide potable water, how do you know it's potable? If something happened with it is it their fault? It's not your fault because in your lease it says they are responsible to make sure you have clean water. So yeah, at least get a lease and if you do have a lease and it doesn't say anything about whose responsibility water is, you should advocate yourself and say this is your property, I drink this water too. I don't want to get sick.

[28:07]

Maggie: No, totally. I think it's good to know just the starting point in the lease from which this came out of and how you had to parse it out a little bit. How many times a year do they test the water?

[28:20]

Scott: They test once a month. We're moving down to two times a month, I think, though, because it's tested negative every time, and now we're coordinating too, so. It feels pretty good. Yeah. My landlords put in a really nice, automated coordination thing too, which is something I requested. Originally, one of the landlords was maintaining the chlorine and doing the testing on the farm, but I asked for them to just get an automated chlorine injector because I trust that over somebody being like oh shit I forgot to put the chlorine in this month. You know. It's a really great intention but let's just do it right.

[28:59]

Maggie: Yeah, say so you don't have a bigger headache down the line.

[29:03]

Andrea: I was wondering what your favorite bins and crates are that are easily sanitized because I have a bunch of bins and crates and now that I'm doing more sanitizing because of COVID, there's some that are actually really annoying to scrub and clean before you can sanitize them. So, I'm just wondering what people have found or what are their favorites because I always need to buy more.

[29:35]

Scott: I love my totes. We just got a grant from NYFC actually this year to buy harvest oats and we got those neon orange harvest oats. Well, they're from Rain Flow on the East Coast, and they're really great to clean and sanitize. They don't have a lot of ridges. We were using black bulk crates before, which are the worst. These orange ones from Rain Flow are actually cheaper than both. They are super cheap. They're \$10 each or something, or \$11 each.

[30:05]

Andrea: What size are they? They look pretty large in the picture.

[30:09]

Scott: They're a little bit bigger than the bulk crate. They are 11 by 27 or something. If you go on Rain Flow's website, they have an orange and green. The green is the bigger one and orange is just the smaller one.

[30:20]

Andrea: OK, but I think I saw in the picture some that are like bulk crates, but they are collapsible. They're black and I have a couple of different designs and some are easier to clean, but the ones that have all this texture on them are so annoying.

[30:40]

Scott: Yeah, the RPCs we used last season as well as bulk crates. The RPCs we sent out for restaurants because then they could collapse and the bulk crates were used for market because they are less annoying, they're more rigid. We just donated all of our RPC's actually. The orange crates nest and stack, which is nice. It's also annoying because you always do the wrong direction when you think you're going to nest you're stacking. They are stacking when you think you're gonna nest, but they clean really easily. They're really cheap. The oranges are nice too because you can tell when they're dirty. Yeah, I like them a lot.

[31:14]

Andrea: Right and what are you using for your sanitizer?

[31:17]

Scott: We just use a bleach solution under the USDA organic NOP standards for using bleach.

[31:23]

Maggie: Andrea, I think that is the million-dollar question to with the crates.

[31:28]

Andrea: I have so many designs of crates and some of them I might have procured because a farmer left them at my farm, and now they're mine but I've never wanted to do a big order because I don't really like that so.

[31:44]

Maggie: Yeah.

[31:45]

Scott: Yeah it took us awhile to settle on crates. Ultimately, we went with these because they were the cheapest by far, especially for shipping. I would prefer the ones that have the little handles that flip down to stack over and rotate, but they were more expensive. I came down to making the decision on the crate because it matters more to just have all the same. Is this the best crate? I feel like it is so we just pick one and we stick with that one and they are just all the same, which is great.

[31:19]

Maggie: I also want to bring everyone's attention to Billy, who just shared VM's blog. He specifically shared a post about cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting and what is the difference between those three steps that helps demystify it a little bit. I also want to shout out that VM did an entire blog post about crates as well, and cleaning and sanitizing them. They are consistently a great resource and I just wanted to shout that out.

[32:48]

Billy: That link will tell you the right concentration for cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting for a bunch of different things, for Clorox, for sanidate. If you're going to start cleaning and sanitizing, it's really good to make sure that it's at the right concentration so you don't accidentally create some brand new risk. Then I just want to add and had to make this comment that aquaponic farms irrigate with water that has fish swimming in it and those farmers are making the same risk decisions that Scott is, you know. So, they think about drip irrigation. They make sure that the water doesn't touch the harvestable portion of the plant. The real risk for those farmers comes from them touching the water with their hands and then dripping that water on to their plants.

[33:33]



Scott: Yeah, that's another part of our written food safety component. A reason we don't irrigate on the same day is because, aside from worrying about the water hitting the plants, if you're doing irrigation and there's going to be a leak, you're going to fix the leak, then your hands are covered in pond water and then you're probably not thinking about it. You're not gonna walk over in washing hands. Then another one of the systems that we have in place for making sure that our crates are clean and sanitized, is something that we just started actually last week, and it works really well. We harvest all of our produce into those orange totes for CSA and then we bring them into the packing shed. On CSA days, we have a three-person team that packs the 65 boxes. The way we set it up as one person builds the wax boxes, one person packs them and we set out all their contents on these onto tables, and one person moves along, fills the box, gives it to the next person who closes it, labels it, and puts in the cooler. That first person, because they can build boxes faster than we can pack and store them, as we're emptying the contents in building the boxes they are replenishing the contents on the table, and then they clean and they sanitize and restack the crate while that's happening. So, by the end of our CSA pack, we've packed, labeled, and stored all of our boxes and actually washed and sanitized all of our crates to get ready for our Friday farmers market harvest so that all is kind of happening at the same time.

[34:58]

Maggie: I'm curious, it looks like in your photos that you bring your dog into the field with you and as someone who lives on their farm and has a dog, I'm just curious how you approach that from a food safety perspective.

[35:10]

Scott: Oh yeah, that's our biggest oversight for sure. Yeah, the dogs come in the field because both of them are terrier mixes and their job is to dig up gophers and they chase the birds out of the field. I got the dog to chase geese out of the field and birds out of the field because I feel like they're a bigger issue.

[35:33]

Maggie: That's good to hear, though. It's helpful to hear that like other people have working dogs in their vegetable area as well. Yeah, like you got a dog that is a working dog and that was on purpose I imagine and just having maybe a policy written into your food safety plan or something that they are there because of other risks of geese or gopher and the dog is helping. It's probably a smart thing to put in writing. If you're ever going to have an inspection or an audit, don't have the dogs there on those days.

[36:11]

Jade: Hi this is Jade with Menorah Farm in Colorado I just wanted to know if everyone had resources that they prefer and would be willing to share on how to actually formulate your legitimate food safety plan. I'm finding it hard, because I'd rather go weed carrots for 12 hours than actually write my food safety plan. In a legal way, I'm not good with the terminology and it scares me a little, so I need some more resources and I'm wondering if anyone has anything helpful?

[36:52]

Maggie: I would love to hear what you used for your plan and then Billy and I could share some other resources that we that we know of.

[37:01]

Scott: You can put together a pretty simple plan pretty quickly. I think the whole theme of this conversation of scaling up food safety, as you're scaling up, you're still in your first season. Our food safety plan looks pretty much like the presentation I gave. I did not write it out in any fancy terms because I think fancy terms also are going to be harder for anybody else who comes to your farm to interact with that guide. I literally just wrote this out with bullet points during our pre-harvest. We maintain food safety by 10 bullet points and then during harvest we maintain food safety by 10 bullet points. So, I just broke down

every step of our day and of the transportation and movement of produce and anywhere that there could be a risk. I just wrote that this is what we do and it's really simple. That's my winter plan and scaling for next year is to take that and then come up with more details and work off of something that's more aligned with gaps and stuff.

[38:04]

Maggie: Jade, I'm curious what exactly you are writing a food safety plan for?

[38:10]

Jade: I wanna write it just for my own peace of mind in case anything goes wrong, but also to work with a wholesale account. I just want to be prepared.

[38:21]

Maggie: I think what Scott said is typically what I've been talking to farmers about, just starting with the things you know you are doing and putting those in writing. Then there are some other templates, like Cornell, for writing a farm food safety plan that will help with GAP certification. So, it's pretty intense. University of Minnesota also released a template or a small-scale farm food safety plan that is not for passing an audit or any sort of certification but might be a place that you can jump up to and then you could go to doing the full-scale audit ready farm food safety plan. Yeah, good question though, and I think we're thinking about that at young farmers as well. Y'all, will get a copy of our food safety guidebook after this focus group and we did have a farmer recently who we met who used it. We have like an outline in the back of our food safety guidebook that are things we would include in a farm food safety plan and so we had a farmer that worked through that list and made their food safety plan. We're going off of that and the work that she did to create an online class that will be around creating a farm food safety plan. It will not be with compliance in mind and that is intentional, because I think a lot of those resources already exist, but that is something that we are thinking a lot about and trying to make a more accessible template.

[40:02]

Scott: If you have specific customers that required food safety written template you could ask them if they would be willing to share what they are looking for. Also, the wholesalers that I'm planning on working with a little bit this fall and then next year he told me he could help. He said I can help you put together your food safety plan and I can send you the templates of folks that we work with.

[40:27]

Maggie: I just also want to say that if anyone ever has any further produce safety questions, you are more than welcome to email me or call me. We are able to do one on one consultations and we would do them over zoom or the phone so we don't have to be there in person with you. We're happy to talk it through. We're always happy to do that. If you're looking for anymore resources, feel free to hit us up.

[40:53]

Everyone: Thank you! Bye!

[40:59]

Thanks for listening to our produce safety focus group series. For visuals from the presentations, more information on this series, and other produce safety resources, visit [youngfarmers.org/focusgroups](http://youngfarmers.org/focusgroups). This podcast was edited by Hannah Beal and recorded in partnership with the National Farmers Union Foundation over the summer of 2020 as part of RF SOP produce safety programming.

[41:36]

*Transcribed by Mackenzie Jeter, National Farmers Union*