

The National Young Farmers Coalition
Focus Group 15 – Transcription

[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 everyone. In every session we bring together people with similar experience 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 bind some practical information for your farm.

[music]

[1:11]

Maggie: My name is Maggie Kaiser, I'm the produce safety training coordinator for the National Young Farmers Coalition and I'm also an urban farmer and nursery grower in New Orleans. So, I would love to go around and hear from each of you now your name, your farm or organization or the location where you're coming from, and then also why you felt drawn to this focus group would be great. I'm going to have Billy and Bre introduce themselves first since they are also part of the unit working together to get these focus groups off the ground. So Billy, would you like to go first?

[1:47]

Billy: Sure! Hey y'all, my name is Billy Mitchell. I work at the National Farmers Union which is based out of Washington DC, but I live on the coast of Georgia in Brunswick, GA. I am the FISMA food safety modernization act training coordinator at the National Farmers Union, which means I just get to talk about food safety all the time. I really love food safety, which I guess this may be weird, but I just find it endlessly fascinating and think that there's a ton of benefits that come from it, and the way you have to think about it. I'm just really looking forward to this focus group today because I had so many misconceptions about food safety before I started teaching it, and I think I still have so many misconceptions about food safety. So, Brie will you go next, please? Oh, my preferred pronouns, are he/ him.

[2:41]

Bre: Thank you Billy. My name is Bre Sliker and my preferred pronouns are she/her. I am currently interning at National Young Farmers Coalition, working with Maggie and Billy this summer on these focus groups. In addition to being the intern, I'm also a graduate student at NYU studying food studies. I recently moved to California 4 weeks ago, so very excited to get some insider scoop. I knew nothing about food safety before doing this internship, so I'm very excited to learn more and more and know what those misconceptions are. I will turn it over to you, Lisa.

[3:26]

Lisa: Hi, my name is Lisa Welch. My pronouns are she/her. I am from Vitality Farms Company in Lakeland FL. So, we grow microgreens and other things and I am super excited to learn a lot of things because I have a lot of questions. I will pass it on to you Catherine.

[3:46]

Catherine: Yeah, my name is Catherine Henning and my pronouns are she/her. I work for a place called Farm Lab about 30 minutes North of San Diego. We grow food for the nine elementary schools in the NCS Union district, so that's 5400 elementary age students. So, I'm really interested, because we're feeding students, I want to make sure that I never get a kid sick.

[4:16]

Maggie: Cool, thanks Catherine. Damiam, I think if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself and if you want just jump right into your presentation from there.

[4:24]

Damian: Great. I'm Damon Valdez and I am here in San Diego. I've worked on a variety of different farms in the area, mainly educational farms. Right now, what I've been doing the past few years is food safety and compliance issues. So, a lot of what I look at are food safety, pesticide compliance, OSHA compliance, and things like that. I've also worked in a variety of different projects. Currently, right now I'm working on an avocado project. I've worked with an orange packinghouse most recently and also, one of the more unique projects I've done, is about a 12-acre coffee farm in Oceanside. So, I have a variety of different experience both in the field and out of the field, which in my conversations with Maggie is to the plus or minus when I'm talking to folks about food safety. It's a two-way street when I'm talking to the supervisor and you don't know what it's like on this end. When I'm talking to the field workers, you don't know what it's like on this end, but the reality is I have the unique experience of doing it all, so I do know what it's like and I understand that the situations are unique. So, with this presentation we're actually going to be looking at California and just some examples that we have going on here, but specifically what we're going to be looking at are the differences between what large scale agriculture does versus what smaller farms may do. I'm going to leave the smaller farms issue a little bit more ambiguous, just because we as smaller farms are going to know inherently, hopefully what it is we're doing and there still may be a lot of questions about that which is great. Just to give you an idea, I'll go ahead, and we'll jump right into this. Alright, so misconceptions of food safety by yours truly, Damon Valdez. These are just the brief learning objectives, so what we're going to be looking at is some sanitation standards for large scale operations versus small scale. With the large scale, we're going to look at a video and for the small scale, we're just going to look at some pictures. We're going to talk about record keeping and traceability and look at an example of that. We will learn about different food safety auditing schemes and the different documented concerns. That's what I talked about with the small-scale stuff. Then, we will learn about common refrains we hear about food safety outbreaks. So, we are going to be looking at an element of how we talk about field workers, mainly people of color, in my instance, generally the Latino population, but there are other migrant populations here in California. There's a quite a large [inaudible] population as well as some other Middle Eastern populations. There are migrant workers here that are subject to a lot of the same, so I want to underscore it

is that they are doing as well. Just so you know we're going to be talking about ready to eat foods in this presentation. Everyone knows that ready to eat means, yes? Billy?

[7:27]

Billy: I would love it a new definition.

[7:29]

Damian: So, in this instance we're talking about anything that you can buy at the farm stand and put in your mouth right away and eat. So, one thing I would like to talk to people about to kind of help wrap their heads around that is where else can you go that has ready to eat food? Anybody can answer.

[7:50]

Billy: Gas stations

[7:51]

Damian: Gas station. Yes, you can get stuff at a gas station. That's wonderful. Restaurants, other things that might be serving hotter prepared food and believe it or not all have food safety regulations that they have to adhere to as well. So, we're going to be talking about California specifically. I want to spend too much time with this, but I wanted to give you guys a bird's eye view of what our neighboring County Imperial Valley looks like. So, what's really interesting about Imperial is that for California, this was also a really big COVID-19 hotspot, because a lot of the labor travels from Mexicali, crosses the border, and then works in the fields that you see there. This is our neighboring County here to San Diego to our East. So, California produces about 1/3 of the countries produce, 1/3 of all fruits and nuts are grown here in California, Monterey County. We called it the salad bowl of the world. It grows about 61% of the country's lettuce and just to kind of give you an idea of what their economics are is, they have about 255 organic producers that sold approximately 479 million in sales. Imperial County that we're looking at right here in this picture. They have about 65 organic producers and they did about 145 million in San Diego with the largest organic farm population is 545 organic producers, and that was only roughly about 97 million of that total. So, here are three auditing standards that we have here in California. So, we have Primus, which here is a golden standard across large scale growers. Primus is an auditing scheme that basically certifies each part of your farm. So, that can be everywhere, from harvesting to the processing. All these different components get their own specific auditing certificate. What this does is food safety plus. This is like FISMA on steroids. Basically, when you're supplying large companies like Walmart or Costco, you have to have Primus plus their specific audit to even get into their facilities. They also have a lab in house so you can send your results like your water testing and things like that to them and they have a really nice interface that you can work with to manage all of your documents. Then you have global gap. Global gap is really cool because it will certify your entire operation, but they also have a specific emphasis on social accountability and sustainability. Primus very down to business, very just getting going. They do look at farmworker standards, but specifically whatever the state is already enforcing generally. So, making sure that people have pesticide training and things like that, and they want to see those logs. So, it's very rigorous. Then we have the California Leafy

Greens Marketing Agreement, which is for any leafy greens you can think of, radicchio, cabbage. So, 90% of the US grown leafy greens are LGMA members. There are different states that have something similar, like Arizona has a marketing agreement as well, which is very in line with the California LGMA. It's a voluntary auditing scheme. Basically, what happens is you are opening yourself up to multiple audits in a year, and you have to pass every single one, no exception, and they have a standard and rubric that goes through. So, it's really interesting when we talk about our next slide, which is Romaine outbreak. So, this is just a nice picture of lettuce, no one be alarmed. Basically, we're gonna look at real quick this 2019 E. Coli outbreak of E. Coli O517H7. Basically, what they found in this specific instance was that they traced everything back, we'll look at a few more slides, and they found that the same strain of E. Coli was living on a cattle grate 2 miles uphill from where the farm was currently located. So, definitely one of those things, for those of you that that missed the conversation prior about rotational grazing, especially on smaller farms where there might be other animals around, it is definitely something to think about because small growers it's not always on your mind. You're working in a confined space. You're not really thinking about where the animals are going. It's always really important to look at that, and there's actually a really nice diagram in the Young Farmers Coalition food safety guidebook that will help you help you see what's going on. I am going to go ahead and start this video and let the quote unquote produce nerd tell us what's going on. She gave me permission to use this video for our presentation, and we're going to look at a romaine heart harvest.

[12:41]

[video playing]

Video: This week on the party center we're gonna take you behind the scenes of a romaine heart harvesting operation. In this operation, the goal is not to just harvest the heads of Romaine lettuce, but to specifically target the romaine hearts. When harvesting, the workers use knives to cut the romaine heads directly above the soil line. When lifting up the romaine heads, the outer leaves fall off. Then the workers make three specific cuts. This process is what creates the romaine heart. These are then placed into bins on the heart secret. Once a bin is filled, the workers spray sanitized water over the harvested product and push the bins onto the conveyor belt. The harvesters grab new bins from overhead and continue harvesting. On the other side of the harvesting rig, there are few workers that take the harvested product and place it into larger bins. Once those bins are full they spray the product with sanitized water, the bags are closed, and they await transport. Once four bins have been filled, the designated vehicle comes to transport the bins to the processor.

[13:48]

Damian: OK, so real quick, just to review what we just saw on top of all this. So, all of those things that you saw those folks wearing are all sanitized, so anything that was white is going to be sanitized. That's going to be logged and documented. That includes the RPC, so the containers, everything that's going into there is cleaned. You saw the non-reusable plastic bag that is used as a liner that they put the romaine into as it is transported. Then you saw their blue gloves. So, sometimes that can be an actual just nitrile glove that's blue, so if they cut themselves or whatever, you can see that little bit that's in there. That would be a contamination, right? So that way it can be identified

and removed, or they might be reusable gloves but same thing. Anything, we saw there is going to be replaced. This is in extreme; this is A+. These folks are in it to win it. You'll see different varying degrees of this. So, if you were to look at any of these other videos on this kind of stream, you would see something like that. So, here's a sample traceability for an operation of about the same scale. I didn't make this label. This is from a farm out in Imperial Valley. You can see with this all the information that they're able to trace back just from one label. So, each of these things actually has a log associated to it, so when there is an outbreak, you can go back to every single one of these components and you can trace back every single thing. The one that always blows my mind is the crew and machine number. They can go back and look up what specific crew, who is on that crew, whether they were sick, had they been sick in the past few days, had they had their food safety training, if the machines had been sanitized, or have they been cleaned? All of these things have logs associated to them through the entire process. So, you can see it's it's complicated, but it's also very robust. The food safety plan also has to incorporate a lot of different things like the product selected sanitizer that has to be verified from the supplier. The supplier has to be verified and that has to be checked and audited every single year. So, we'll zoom right through these next few slides. So with E coli, what's really interesting is that it doesn't have to just be present on the plant. There was a study that was done with E. Coli O157H7, that found that it could be taken up from the soil and actually into the plant and stored in the plant cells, so that's a big issue. This picture here we're actually more concerned about salmonella, and we only know that because what happened with this picture is that there was compost tea sprayed a day before harvest, which could be OK, if the process was standardized and verified, which it was not. Unfortunately, there was tortoise manure added to it and reptiles are known for having a lot of salmonella, this just became a liability, so this was not harvested. We're going to go through a bunch of slides. I'm going to show you an image, and then I want you to tell me what you see as a potential issue, OK? And go. So what do we see that is wrong in this photo?

[17:05]

Lisa: Floods and snail damage and poop.

[17:07]

Damian: OK, so we saw the poop, good, and this is a rodent damage. So, something like this we would not be able to harvest. In some instances, in places that I've been a lot of, it's just like hey, we just need the poundage so you're going to handle it, which is not an OK thing. So, what do we see is wrong in this photo? Anybody?

[17:29]

Maggie: That knife is in the ground, straight in the ground.

[17:32]

Damian: Exactly, yes, the harvest knife is in the ground, it's not stored in a sanitary way. So, just to give you an idea, this is just what I look at as a food safety individual. The knife obviously hasn't been cleaned in awhile, but also this tape here around the handle, right? So, this is something, and we'll see an example of it a little bit later, that can harbor bacteria, catch debris and things like that. So, ideally if you're not using

the knife, it should be stored in its proper spot, which would be a sheath, not your back pocket, not the back of the truck that you rode in on and making sure that it's being used properly. Alright, so this for those of you that have had pesticide experience or maybe not, you might know the rest of this. So, when working around pesticides we say the label is...

[18:18]

Maggie: The law!

[18:19]

Damian: The law, perfect, yes, the label is the law. So in this instance this is a solution of bleach and water that was used as a sanitizing agent to use on the tops of table tops and things like that. What had happened with this is, as you can see, there's these little chunks that you see floating around in there. And so, this bleach had had been sitting in this bottle for a little bit. So, the bottle was marked bleach properly, but it wasn't marked with a day on when it had been created. So what I did is I took a bleach testing strip. I tested the parts per million which should be about 200 parts per million of the bottle or the solution for it to be affective in. The label indicates that it has to be used in 24 hours, so with that I tested it 100 parts per million. So, it wasn't actually doing what we thought it should be doing, which means it's not working the way we want it to. This one here real quick.

[19:14]

Catherine: Dirty.

[19:16]

Damian: Dirty yeah, dirty bins. Dirty, gross harvest bins. This right here this is kind of a hard one but what's going on?

[19:26]

Billy: Pooling water

[19:27]

Damian: So, this is condensation is coming from the cooler, which is difficult to deal with without a doubt, but does anyone know off the top of their head why we're worried about condensation or just pooling water in general in these areas?

[19:41]

Lisa: Bacteria can breed in the water.

[19:43]

Damian: Yeah, specifically what we're looking for is *Listeria monocytogenes*, so *Listeria* is a big issue. So, in this instance you might be putting something in the cooler, you drop it whatever. I'm just going to pick it back up and throw it in there, because I don't want it to go to waste right? And that's how you have an onion recall. I mean I don't know that that's the case, but that would be my guess is that something similar happened. It got

on the rollers and then everything passing over. It also touched the same surface. Alright, so there's our thing. What about right here?

[20:15]

Billy: It doesn't look like that bin is labeled pant hanging area, so.

[20:22]

Damian: So, here's the trash game. It actually says nonedible and the overalls here were worn for cleaning vegetables just draped over the trash can, so obviously not where we want to be storing. This is a hygienic issue here. Cool, so that concludes our small farms deficiencies thing. So real quick we just want to look at the last two things here to tie it all together. Why does Large scale agriculture need food safety? So here are some common refrains that I've heard, and you can read them yourselves here. I'll just pick out a few and most of them have to do with the individuals that are doing the harvesting. It's because the people are dirty. They're not from here. They poop in the field, or they may use pesticides. What I want to highlight about some of those issues is obviously they're not directed at the operation; they are directed at the individual that's conducting work. And as we saw, maybe that's not the reality, but also that some of these issues once upon time were real issues. People had to fight to get the rights to actually have a toilet within a quarter mile of where they work. Or have boundaries around where pesticides are used or not used when they're present. Those are definitely things that people have had to fight for and in some cases lost their lives. You know, it's definitely a much different experience out there. So, let's look at some of the small-scale farms. Why do a lot of folks say they don't need to work with food safety? They say it's too expensive, they only sell to their community, it's not based on science, they only use organic pesticides, or they just wash it off. So, the thing with the pesticides is that anything including the bleach, if it has an EPA registration number, that means it's under FIFRA and so that means that the label is the law. Common phrases we hear when we are talking about fieldworkers are, I could never work that fast, I can't believe they work in those heat or those conditions, or I can't believe they wear long sleeves. These are all phrases that are good to understand and acknowledge because they tell us where we are in the spectrum of privilege and what we're not subjected to or what we don't have to subject ourselves to. We have a choice, sometimes, not always. What it doesn't do is it doesn't help us meet our colleagues professionally. It doesn't actually engage the people that are doing the work to the point that we understand them as educated individuals that have a lot of background and understanding about the work that they're doing. So, there's different kind of phrases that we can use around that, right? For example, I want to be able to work that fast and to be able to do it safely, right? I want to work fast, but a lot of times it's like coming through like the Tasmanian devil. You know you could say you want to understand your crop in the same way that your colleagues might in the field. Or you just want to be as committed as they are to their profession in their work, or even if you can, if it's not entirely necessary for you to meet them entirely at a certain level, but you can still honor your colleagues out in the field by saying, hey, we don't go to this extent, but here is what we do do for these reasons and completely understand why it is we do what we do. So, just making sure that we're giving the folks that are in the field the benefit of the doubt. The misconceptions that we were dealing with here are how we

perceive what's happening in large scale agriculture versus small scale agriculture and how do we reconcile the two. That will jump into the questions that you guys might have. That can be all over the place. These are just some questions I put out for us just to think about or help think about something. Maggie I will let you take it from here.

[24:11]

Maddie: Thank you so much Damien, you're an excellent educator and I learned a ton from that presentation. I want to say to, my conversations with you, Damian, leading up to the focus group and then the actual the focus group, you have given me a picture into large scale agriculture that I never had before and have taught me so much. I think now is the time for questions.

[24:37]

Catherine: I have questions, Damien. Well, I have two questions, so my first one is we're getting a brand-new washing pack built out here at Farm Lab and what would be some of the core things that you would want to see in a new washing pack area?

[24:57]

Damien: Oh, that's a really good question. It's not cheap, but stainless is always really nice if possible. Definitely looking at that, but also the structure if it's going to be enclosed or not. I'm sure it's what they called 4 sticks in a lid and if it is then you have to worry about animals. So, I know there's birds and squirrels and things that potentially come through. I would say just work around what is efficient for you in your design. What makes sense for flow? For materials, stainless is great. A lot of people use different materials for the wash bins. You know they might use feed troughs or they might even use heavy duty food grade ones. I'd say that's like the biggest issue is making sure you're using something that's of food grade because rust can always become an issue, but really it's your set up and breakdown of the day to day. So when you're going to be doing the harvest, has the area been washed down or cleaned and wiped down specifically because it is open. You're starting fresh during your harvest. Then things come through, and then you can wipe down afterward as well. So, it's kind of like an opening and closing sequence.

[26:11]

Maggie: Catherine, can I add a few things too? I have some suggestions that aren't necessarily totally food safety related, but are also to help you save your back. I think as much as you can put things on wheels and then you can move them around and easily clean behind them. Which brings up this idea, which is something that I've been learning a lot about this summer, but hygienic design or sanitary design has to do as much with surfaces, so talking about stainless steel, which is a super easy to clean, but also the hygienic design of your space. So how easily can you move tables or shelving and clean behind things so that you don't have vegetable culls that are piling up and the rodents are getting too? I'm not sure how big your space is. Can you offer some more details about dimensions? I'm curious about your scale.

[27:13]

Catherine: Maybe you can see it in the background here. The frame is going up out here so it's a repurposed greenhouse. It's around a 40 foot by 40 feet by 30 feet wide and half of that is gonna be more of a front end sales place for the ecology center. Moving tables are expected in there and walk-in cooler and I'm really curious about draining. If I'm letting

my stuff drain, is it best letting that water go off the tables or directing it to avoid that standing water issue?

[27:53]

Damien: Yeah, that's actually super important that you mentioned that. Think about that in the design. Are you guys putting in like a gravel floor?

[28:03]

Catherine: Gravel.

[28:04]

Damien: So gravel? So, think about maybe putting in a french drain system to help move that water away so that it's not just piling up in there and just making eventually a muddy mess. They might even be able to grate it gently for you and not moving into the fields but moving into an area where it can be potentially used for flowers or things like that.

[28:24]

Catherine: Cool and then my second question is that I have a lot of volunteers and I know you as well, Damien, have worked with a lot of volunteers, but how do you know manage? Or is it not a good idea to be using volunteers to help harvest, because of sanitation and just keeping people all in the same page is challenging.

[28:50]

Damien: First of all, I'll do a plug. So, they actually did a food safety presentation that you can go back and listen to specifically on volunteers. Maggie, did y'all cover any of that?

[29:01]

Maggie: We had one focus group with an educational farm and it was someone that works on educational farms. Then we had another one that talked about worker training in which we had volunteers and students brought up.

[29:12]

Damien: Cool, so in my professional opinion, it can be done, but I think it's labor intensive on your end. I think what has to happen is you have to make sure that it works for you. You're going to have to train them on the basics and document that because they are working with the food, so you would want to get their signature. Maybe on the sign in sheet have the topics in food safety you're going to be discussing. Determine whether it's going to be a regular group of folks, so you only have to do it once potentially, or if it's revolving, that's where you're spending a lot more time doing these types of things and it might be, depending on how the volunteer situation set up, maybe they have an orientation where they come and learn about what you all are doing there. You can incorporate that food safety thing and then you can get them to sign off on it and then give a quick rundown on it before you get started. Also in that instance, you're probably doing less of the harvest and more of the management and running around to watch what people are doing. So, it really depend. You know your volunteers and what they're like. If it's like chasing cats, it may not be worth it to you, but if you have a core group of people that you train and you can trust, and as an organization you feel comfortable with that, because in all of this, what we're talking about is risk and liability. If that's OK

for everyone, great. Who am I to say? But those would be my recommendations, if you're going to go that route.

[30:53]

Catherine: Well, thank you.

[30:54]

Damien: Anyone else? I mean, I feel like I'm talking a lot. Does anyone else have anything to add? Questions, concerns, feelings?

[31:01]

Catherine: I mean I have more questions. We're working on getting a walk-in cooler here, but cooling produces definitely a challenge for me and I'm having to keep melons in the field longer than I want. Do you have any like words of wisdom to that? I don't have a walk-in cooler, it was 95 degrees all last week, and the water in San Diego is too warm to cool produce. The water is 75 degrees coming out of the tap or something.

[31:35]

Damien: I think I have 100% confidence that you're doing everything that you can because it's super difficult. I think a lot of farmers have to start without refrigeration. Just to give some background, I worked in a similar situation to what Cat's doing, but it was contracted out to work where Cat's at. What we do is we would harvest and then drive it over a hill and then wash it and then put it in a cooler after it had maybe sat in the back of something for awhile. It was not easy and so Cat maybe explain to them kind of what the process is like. Do you just wash and then just and you load it in to take it to school? Or how does it work?

[32:16]

Catherine: Yeah, essentially I'm pulling the produce in from the field, washing it on some very rudimentary tables, and I have a couple like food grade wash tubs that I can submerge lettuce, dump the lettuce in and spray off carrots. Then it's going in packaging in the reusable totes and sits in the back of the bread truck until all the produce is in there and then it goes, hopefully soon.

[32:48]

Damien: Yeah, something that may be worthwhile than talking to the school about, is putting a refrigeration unit on the truck because then you have a mobile refrigerator, which makes everyone's life a lot easier. Then you can harvest and load up whenever is convenient for you. You can still have your big harvest day, but maybe there's some smaller harvest you did along the way. Things took a little bit more time, or maybe you did a bulk carrot harvest with volunteers. Then we're able to wash and clean and load and make sure that it's refrigerated. That might save you some time so that all they have to do is come and pick up the truck and deliver. What's important there? I didn't put this slide in, but definitely just checking the temperature of the cooler and making sure that it's at the appropriate cooling operating temperature, especially if it's just going to be the truck. Checking it they say at least once a day but I'm a huge proponent of twice a day. 24 hours is a huge interval for your fridge to go down and you not to know about it in my opinion, so checking it at the beginning of the end of the day, tells you where

you're at. So, if it goes out overnight then you know I was still at this temperature when I left and I'm at this temperature now this morning. So, you have an idea of where the variance has been. Where if it went out right after you checked it and you don't ever check it again and come back the next day, it might get a little hot and some lettuce might be pretty grumpy.

[34:17]

Maggie: I also just wanna mention, and again Cat, I'm not sure of the scale, but a lot of the farmers we work with use cool bots so I don't know if you've heard of it but wanted to make the plug for a cool bot. If funding is an issue, it can be just maybe a tool to use and to appeal to the side of the school that maybe wants to save a little money. I think too you could get thermostats that are smart thermostats so they're connected to your phone and you can just be checking them, if you're not starting in the same place as your cooler would be another option.

[34:58]

Damien: Cat, are you familiar with cool bots?

[35:00]

Catherine: Yeah, I've heard of it and we are getting a cool bot prefab actual walk in cooler system. Yeah, hopefully that'll be up soon but I'm always thinking too, like when we scale it up and what that looks like here too.

[35:18]

Damien: That's a huge thing too because you guys have a lot of space to grow into and so making sure that that cooler meets your needs and definitely down the road that may be an instance of where definitely a refrigeration unit on that truck is gonna make a lot of sense and a lift gate. I know just dollar bill signs are racking up right now, but what that saves you from doing is trying to pick up heavy produce and picking it up and swinging and throwing it on. Those ergonomics aren't always the best. So, if you can just load your entire harvest and pick it up and just pull it on to the truck, that's going to be really easy on the body, really easy on time. All those things you gotta think about, and definitely to tie it back into what we saw earlier is looking at the ergonomics of things and how they look. One thing we didn't go into, I did leave a link. There's actually a page of links for y'all with some articles. I would really love it if y'all would at least the first 3. What we didn't get into is piece meal work. So, the folks that are picking strawberries and other small things that have to be done by hand. Definitely understanding if we haven't done that type of work, it's really good that we don't even try to pretend like we have, but it's really hard and difficult and you bend over a lot and it's very painful. I just want to do that quick plug, but that's what I was thinking of when you're talking about that cat is. Definitely being able to get into the truck would be great, but getting you a lift gate would be greater so that we don't have to worry about you hurting yourself and then not being able to do the great work that we need to do. I just wanted to plug, as an operations person that works specifically with worker safety, I think of myself more as a farmworker advocate, even in management role, much to the chagrin of people in management that may not like it so much is definitely understanding that a lot of the things that are out there, that we may not know about. Such as, you know, the different legalities of trainings we need to have or not

have, or how we're doing something, is making sure we're going out and doing that not only for ourselves and our own edification, but also making sure that we're doing what's best for everyone that we're working with and the community that's involved with us, or whether we have volunteers or other people that come around the farm because that's sort of our obligation to them. And again, understanding that a lot of the laws, I can guarantee you it's not as though the federal government just decided, oh hey, we want to just start regulating this stuff. It's because people literally died, whether from foodborne illnesses from heat exhaustion from pesticide exposure. All of these things it is privileged to not have to worry about those instances, but definitely we owe it to ourselves and to our colleagues that we work with in the field and out of the field to make sure that we're on the up and up with those things for everyone's best interests.

[38:13]

Maggie: I couldn't have said it better. I mean thank you so much and I can tell it's just so obvious that your knowledge base is so vast and I think that that is an especially important thing as an advocate. That's an incredibly important role that you are playing for farmworkers in California, and I really appreciate the racial equity ones that you brought to this focus group. So, thank you very much, Damien. So, with that, y'all are free to go. Thanks so much for being here and spending an hour with us.

[38:49]

Everyone: Thank you.

[music]

[38:55]

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. 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.

[39:24]

Transcribed by Mackenzie Jeter, The National Farmers Union