

NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION

Collective Farming Efforts and Food Safety Tipsheet



Goal

THIS TIPSHEET IS MEANT FOR FARMS WHO ARE:

- “Qualified Exempt” from FSMA’s Produce Safety Rule (PSR,) and;
- aren’t trying to pass a GAP audit.

For “fully covered” farms under FSMA or farms who are getting a GAP audit, they must have many of these procedures in place.

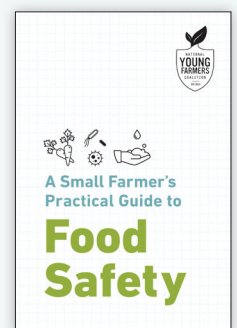
Don’t know if you’re covered or not? Check out the second chapter of our [guidebook](#).

The point of this tipsheet is to offer a starting point for a produce safety conversation when working with other growers and farmers in a collective way, whether through aggregating your produce through a CSA or farmshare, hosting a cooperative farmers’ market table, etc. In these situations, a collective mentality usually helps get the produce to more people, enhances small farmers’ ability to move produce in variable quantities, and supports cooperation over competition. It also can be a place to be explicit about produce safety expectations so all are on the same page with food safety on your respective farms. As a collective of farms, you have a communal responsibility to provide safe produce to your customers.

So what could these guidelines look like?

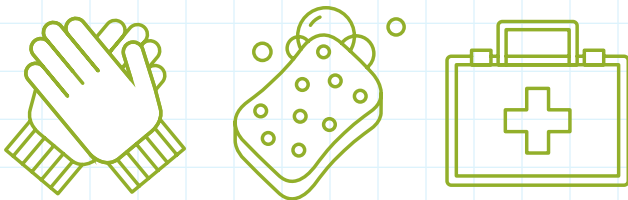
The following outline breaks it down by topic so you can ask questions of one another and determine what is relevant and useful to your situation.

We wrote this tipsheet as a list of questions to get the conversation started. This corresponding tipsheet and our [guidebook](#) can be a resource to find out more about the topics raised as questions here!



WORKER HEALTH AND HYGIENE

- **Worker training** is a must! If you all have employees (friends, family and volunteers count, too!), they also need to understand the ins and outs of handwashing and hygiene. If your operations are similar, this could be something you collaborate on as well, maybe CRAFT-style, covering different topics at rotating farms with different farmers.
- What is the **handwashing** situation on your farms? Are there adequate handwashing and toilet facilities on the farm? Are they cleaned and stocked regularly?
- What are the protocols for **when** and **how** to wash hands?
- What are the rules for how you and your workers stay clean? Why is **clean clothing** important if you're just going to get dirty anyway?
- Where do you take a well-deserved **break**?
- How do you handle **illness** or **injury** on the farm? Do you have a well-stocked first aid kit on hand? What is the plan or policy for when you or your workers aren't feeling well? Do you have work options that don't include produce handling? Do your workers or volunteers know symptoms of communicable disease and when it's best for them to stay home?
- Do you have a **glove policy**?



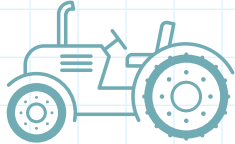
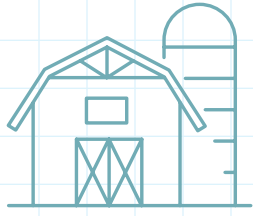
Water

- Where does your water come from? Do you store water on the farm?
- How do you irrigate?
- Do you use water for mixing sprays or making compost tea?
- Do you test your water?
- How close to harvest do you irrigate or use water?
- Do you wash produce on your farm? Do you make or use ice?
- Where does the water for your handwashing stations come from?



Wildlife and Domesticated Animals

- Do you know what kinds of animals are entering your fields (both wild and pets)?
- What is your practice if there is animal poop in the growing field (or other forms of obvious animal disturbance)?



Land Use

- Do you know how the land was used prior to you growing on it? Is anything stored underground? Could there have been potential leaks to contaminate soil (old fuel tanks, leaky tractors or parked cars, dump site)?
- What do your neighbors do and how does that impact food safety on your farm?
- Do you have fences up around your growing area to prevent unwanted or unknown visitors (both animals and humans)?

Soil Amendments

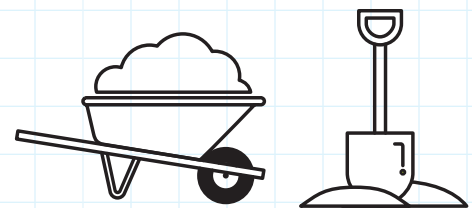
Do you use soil amendments on your farms?

- What is the soil amendment? Where do you get it? If you make it, how do you make it?
- When are you applying it? How much time is left between applying the soil amendment and harvesting the crop? Is the harvestable portion of the crop present (flowers count as “harvestable portion”)? Do you apply the soil amendment when all the crops have been harvested or before planting?
- How are you applying the soil amendment? Are you injecting it into the dripline, are you foliar feeding, side dressing?
- Do you follow label instructions regarding concentration and application rates?
- Do you keep any records about soil amendment application?

Do you have designated tools that are used for handling soil amendments and designated harvest only tools?

Where do you store soil amendments? Are they covered to prevent animal intrusion and runoff? Are they kept away from produce handling areas? Do you keep finished and unfinished compost separate?

Do you keep any records about soil amendment application?



Harvest and Post Harvest Handling

- Do you have a **regular cleaning schedule** for food contact surfaces: tables, harvest bins, wash tubs, harvest tools, anything coming into contact with produce?
- What kinds of harvest **boxes/crates/totes** do you use? What kinds of cleaning policies or practices do you have around those? Do you have any specific harvest practices that you're using to reduce risk?
- What kind of food **packing materials** do you use?
 - Where do you store your packing materials? Do you have an area where they can be kept off the ground and inspected for pest intrusion?
 - Do you reuse wax boxes? If so, are you lining those used boxes so that the produce doesn't come in contact with the box?
- Washing and packing spaces
 - Are there policies for these spaces? If these spaces are shared, are there **SOPs** in place for how to **clean and sanitize** the space?
- Produce storage
 - Do you use a walk-in cooler or refrigerator to store your produce?
 - How do you ensure that condensate from the cooling unit doesn't come in contact with the stored produce?
 - Do you have an established cooler packing rotation and are you dating your produce to ensure **FIFO (first in, first out)**? Are there other practices you use to keep your cooler organized and clean?
 - Do you monitor the temperature in your cooler, and do you have a method to ensure that it is accurate?
- Produce delivery
 - Are there policies about how to box shares that include meat, eggs, cheese, or other **non-produce items**?
 - What do you use to transport your produce? Do you have a dedicated vehicle?
- **Food Safety Plan:** Does your farm have a food safety plan in place?

This resource is supported by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$60,000 received from National Farmers Union with 100 percent funded by FDA/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by FDA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [FDA.gov](https://www.fda.gov).