

NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS COALITION

# Volunteers and Food Safety:

A Tipsheet for Urban Growers



# Goal

**Make a volunteer policy that fits your farm.**

## WHY?

Urban farms can be a hub and a location for community to connect to agriculture. As a farm manager, you might get many requests to host volunteers. You'll need to make sure that the volunteers know how to keep themselves and your produce safe.

## DO YOU WANT VOLUNTEERS?

Anyone who has hosted volunteers knows that they're not just free labor! In exchange for their time, you'll need to plan to train, manage, and be available to them. Additionally, they may be volunteering to learn about the farm or growing food. Try to understand their motivation in order to make the experience most useful for both of you and to improve the chances that they'll volunteer again.



## Visitor vs. Volunteer

Volunteers are technically “workers,” for farms that are fully covered by FSMA, so they **MUST** be trained to know: the basics of food safety, the importance of personal hygiene, how to know if someone has an illness that could cause contamination, and any other requirements from the Produce Safety Rule that they would need to complete their job. Additionally, if they are also harvesting, they **MUST** know when not to harvest produce (for example, when it has animal poop on it), how to inspect bins and harvest equipment, and how to report or correct issues with harvest materials. Even if you aren't fully covered by FSMA's Produce Safety Rule, incorporating these ideas into your policy or training can be very useful.

**VISITORS:** If you have folks on the farm who aren't doing any work, there are still things they should know. Communicate with them to stay home if they're sick, how and when and where to wash their hands, and to leave their pets at home.

# Guiding Questions:

You can use these questions to shape your volunteer policy.

- Do volunteers work on your farm?
- Do you have a visitor policy? Where do you post it?
- Do you train volunteers? What does the training cover?
- What activities do you do with volunteers?
- Do volunteers harvest, wash, handle produce? *You may decide that it's simply too risky to allow volunteers to help harvest or wash produce, as this is an area where cross-contamination is more likely to occur and where extra training might be needed to ensure that volunteers can keep standards high.*
- Do you have handwashing and toilet facilities available to volunteers?
- Do volunteers know when to wash their hands?
- How do volunteers know which areas of the farm they can and cannot access?
- Do you have animals? Do volunteers participate in animal chores?
- Do you have compost on the farm? Is there any reason the volunteers would be in contact with compost?
- Do you have a break area for volunteers?
- Do volunteers know to wear clean clothes/shoes every day they work on the farm?
- Are volunteers doing other activities? (dining/picnicking/education/agritourism/potluck)
- Do you have signs on your farm?



*Signs help indicate where bathroom and handwashing facilities are, what parts of the farm are off limits, finished vs unfinished compost piles, where people can take a break and eat, what surfaces/areas are for clean vs dirty produce, etc.*

# Sample Policy/Volunteer Training Document

***Why we care:** We want to make sure our community and consumers get the healthiest and highest quality food we can provide, full of nutrients and not risky in terms of foodborne illness. Also, we want our volunteers to understand what their time at the farm will be like so that they can be prepared, engaged, and have a great time!*

## EXPECTATIONS:

Volunteers could participate in activities like planting, weeding, harvesting, washing vegetables, clearing beds, carpentry or other special activities (1). You'll work under the supervision of the farm manager who will be on site during your volunteer shift.

## WHAT TO WEAR:

All clothing, including your rain gear and boots, should be clean. This is important because we value produce safety and want to avoid cross-contamination (2). We suggest dressing in layers, with a hat, closed-toed shoes/rubber boots, and long pants and a long-sleeved shirt (3).

## WHAT TO BRING:

Non-glass (4) water bottle, food, lunch or snacks, rain gear, boots, sunscreen, hat, work or gardening gloves, if preferred.

## WHAT TO LEAVE HOME (5):

Pets (6). Jewelry, especially hand jewelry, could have spots for bacteria to grow (7). Plus, we don't want you to lose or damage jewelry or get it caught in a way that could be dangerous for you. We love kids, but we ask that you don't bring children under 14 along with you for your volunteer shift (8).

## SICKNESS:

If you're sick, please stay home and take care of yourself. We want you to recover, and we want to protect those on the farm and our consumers.

*(Continued on the next page.)*

## NOTES:

1. You may choose to limit the contact that volunteers have with harvested produce.
2. Sometimes explaining "why" is helpful to be sure that volunteers understand why you're requesting this.
3. This isn't a food safety suggestion, but might be helpful in case of sunburn, ticks, or other irritants, like scratchy squash leaves.
4. Glass shouldn't be used since, if it broke, it could be a "physical hazard."
5. Try to use positive language instead of "Don't" language.
6. Pets can poop! Also, they could be a liability.
7. Again, explaining why can be helpful.
8. This isn't a food safety rule, but being clear about who can and cannot volunteer is helpful.

# Sample Policy/Volunteer Training Document (Continued.):

## CELL PHONE POLICY (9):

We provide wipes to clean cell phones at the start of your volunteer shift. We ask that you minimize cell phone use while in the garden, for food safety and to encourage presence and mindfulness in this space. If you have to step away to use your phone, we ask that you wash your hands before returning to your task.

## WHERE TO GO/WHAT PARTS OF THE FARM TO AVOID:

Please park **(10)** on the gravel to the west of the shed. As you walk around the farm, stay on paths and avoid kneeling or standing on plants. Please only enter the cooler **(11)** if you have permission to do so. To receive the vegetables in exchange for your volunteer shift, please ask Maggie to retrieve them from the cooler at the end of your shift.

## WHERE TO USE THE RESTROOM/WASH HANDS:

All volunteers should use the portapotty as the restroom and wash their hands with soap for 20 seconds at the handwashing station to the left of the portapotty.

## WHEN TO WASH HANDS:

When you arrive, after going to the bathroom, after eating, before putting on gloves, after a break, after using your phone, any other time they might be contaminated **(12)**. Hand sanitizers cannot substitute handwashing.

## EATING:

We ask that you enjoy lunch and snacks only at the picnic table located to the east of the shed. For allergen concerns, we ask that you please don't bring food containing peanuts or sesame.

Eating near the produce could compromise our food safety practices. Please only munch on the snacks you've brought to the farm, not the produce growing the garden. We encourage you to drink water anywhere and abundantly. Stay hydrated!

Please don't chew gum on the farm.

*(Continued on the next page.)*

## NOTES (Continued):

- 9. FSMA does not specifically call out cell phones as a potential route of cross-contamination. But we know that we use our phones at times when pathogens could be introduced, like in bathroom or while handling farm animals. We suggest adding it to your visitor policy language and suggesting that folks wash their hands after using their phones.**
- 10. Clarity about parking is always helpful if people drive to your farm.**
- 11. Consider if there are risks to having extra people in your cooler, chicken coops, compost areas, greenhouses, high tunnels, and give clear guidelines about spaces they should avoid unless asked.**
- 12. If the farm has animals or compost, there should language about washing hands after touching those things, too.**

# Sample Policy/Volunteer Training Document (Continued.):

## IN CASE OF INJURY OR EMERGENCY:

First aid kits are located inside the shed on the wall to the left of the door **(13)**. If you cut yourself, please use a Band-Aid and cover the bandage with a nitrile glove. Let us know if there are any injuries, even if they're minor, as we have to keep track of injuries for food safety purposes. If an injury is serious, call 911! Please let us know if you have any allergies or medical conditions that we should be aware of (i.e., bee allergy and use of epi-pen).

## WHEN IN DOUBT, JUST ASK!

If we explained something and it's not clear, please ask for more information. Maggie is our volunteer coordinator, but anyone on the farm is always happy to answer questions.

## TRASH

Labeled bins for trash, recycling, and compost are located on the east side **(14)** of the shed. Please put all trash in the correct bin and make sure the lid is on snugly.

## POOP

Occasionally, a bird, cat, or other animal poops on the farm. If you see poop, in the garden beds, shed, packing area, or in harvest totes, please report it to Aaron, the farm manager.

## OTHER VOLUNTEERS/VISITORS/STAFF:

Please speak kindly and respectfully to other humans at the garden.

## SMOKING:

Our property is a drug-free, alcohol-free, smoke-free farm.

## ANY QUESTIONS?

Please sign here so that we know that you've read this document.

## NOTES (Continued):

- 13. Be specific about exactly where the first aid box is located!**
- 14. If the farm is sprawling, you may want to have a map with your volunteer materials.**

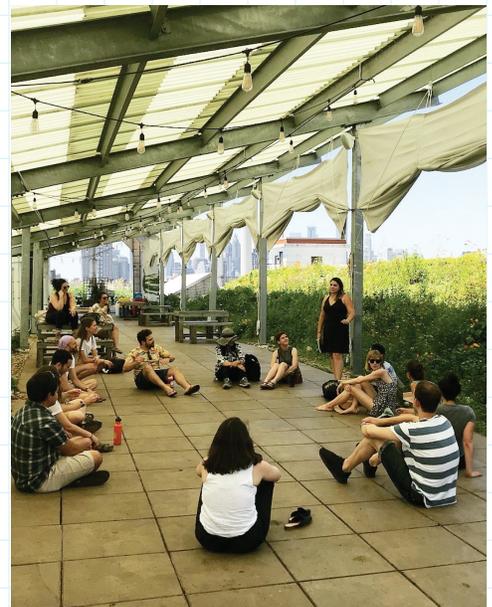
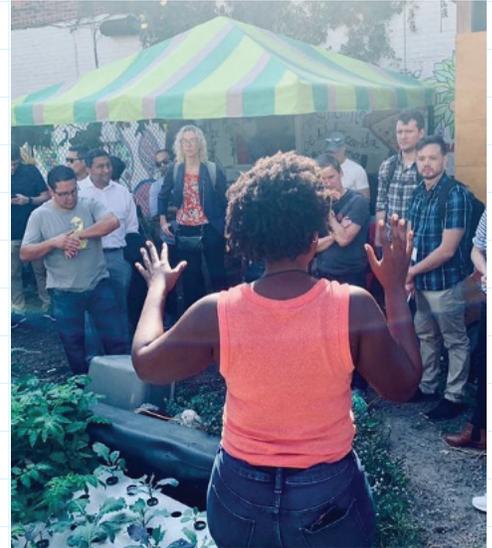
# How to Share Your Volunteer Policy:

## Some options include:

- on a poster
- on a white board
- laminated on the wall
- a sandwich board at the entry
- on your website
- posted near visitor sign-in sheets
- on a Google form that volunteers need to fill out to work for the day

You may **keep a full copy for yourself** in a binder with other food safety or farm management materials. Some of this information might be shared with all visitors on the farm and other parts might be more specific to volunteers who are doing specific tasks.

For a larger volunteer program, you may want to include an evaluation for the volunteers and a **media release** so that the farm can use pictures of the volunteers.



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