

Produce Safety from a Tennessee Grower Perspective



Tennessee Vegetable Production

- Over 1,500 vegetable farms, approx. 35,000 acres (U.S. Census, 2007)
- Ranked 3rd in the nation for fresh-market tomato and snapbean production
- Also, have historically ranked in Top 10 for pumpkin and yellow squash production



TN Fruit and Vegetable Market Value

\$75,000,000

- Tomatoes
 - Over 800 farms, over 4,000 acres
- Snapbeans
 - Over 500 farms, over 10,000 acres
- Melons
 - Nearly 700 farms, over 900 acres
- Leafy Greens and Cabbage
 - Over 250 farms, over 1,000 acres

Tennessee Vegetable Production

- Two-thirds of vegetable farms < 5 acres
- Steady increase in market growers with diverse mix of crops
- More and more direct marketing



Food Safety

- Currently, 3rd party audits are voluntary or mandated by the buyer
- However, the majority of buyers now requiring them
 - Food City
 - Ingles
 - Krogers
 - Wal-mart

What does this mean for TN growers?

- Time to make critical decisions
 - Make necessary modifications to their operations
- OR
- Find another way to make a living
- Less than 20 farms have been audited in TN

What has been done?

- UT in cooperation with the TDA has offered programs on GAPs (Good Agricultural Practices), mock audits and food safety plan writing workshops
- Over 30 trainings across the state since 2009 and over 800 growers, workers and Extension professionals trained
- TAEP Food Safety and TDA cost-share
- Greater awareness of best practices

What has been done?

- On the grower side, millions of dollars and countless hours spent to comply with regulations
 - Changing harvest bins
 - Enclosing packinghouses
 - Traceback
 - Worker training
 - Food safety personnel
- No increase in price received by grower

What does this mean for smaller TN growers?

- Example:
 - Appalachian Harvest is a grower cooperative, packer and marketer
 - Proactive- implemented own food safety program and food safety plans for all growers
 - In 2012, if not audited, would lose over 60% of market
 - Aggregated audits

How will we move forward?

- Harmonized approach
- Creativity!- Where there's a will, there's a way!
- Resources
- Recognizing opportunities

Questions?

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