

USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Training for Asparagus, Cherry, Peach and Apple Growers

Food Safety and Michigan Fruit & Asparagus Producers

Project Summary

Recent food scares across the nation have made food safety a top priority for Michigan fruit and vegetable producers. Because of the food scares and Michigan's fruit and vegetable business with the US Department of Agriculture, educational classes were held for producers to train them in complying with a USDA GAP audit.

Goals and Objectives of Project

In order for Michigan producers to remain competitive in selling fresh and processed products, it is imperative that Michigan farmers demonstrate they are good stewards by participating in the USDA GAP program. By participating in the program, growers are required to develop a farm manual which describes practices, policies, and procedures at the farm level. These practices include implementation of a food safety program, worker health & hygiene, water usage, sewage treatment, animals/wildlife exposure, manure and municipal biosolids, field sanitation and hygiene, field harvesting and transportation and traceability.

It is important to note that not only does USDA require the GAP certification, retailers such as WalMart, Spartan, and Meijer are now asking producers for third party certification. Additionally, these retailers recognize and accept the USDA GAP certification at the farm level.

Expected Outcomes Achieved

The Work Plan called for eight grower meetings to be held in Southwest, West Central and Northern Michigan for approximately 380 asparagus, cherry, peach and apple growers. Growers were to be provided with a farm manual and a 15-minute DVD on worker health & hygiene training.

Eight grower meetings were held from January 28 through March 17, 2010. Approximately 440 growers attended the educational classes.

Lessons Learned

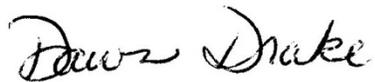
GAP Training remains a high priority for Michigan agricultural producers. Some of the 440 participants had been through the classes in 2009 but for many, it was their first introduction to the program. Overall, the program was very well received (noting the number of participants) and considered extremely successful.

Our association has received many calls since the meetings asking for additional guidance on particular questions as it pertains to certain farming operations. Growers are to be commended for embracing the program and preparing for an actual farm audit for the 2010 harvesting season.

Beneficiaries

In addition to the producers benefiting from the program, retail and wholesale customers will benefit from these classes as they can assure their consumers that proper food safety is happening at the farm level. Ultimately, the consumer is an important beneficiary as well.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dawn Drake".

Dawn Drake, Manager
Michigan Processing Apple Growers