

Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)

Mon, Dec 05, 2022 5:37PM 12:35

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

fisma, produce safety rule, farm, linda, training, grower, north central region, produce, center, iowa state university, compliance, foodborne illnesses, food, rule, exemption, iowa, krista, safety, dates, vegetable grower

SPEAKERS

Christa Hartsook, Linda Naeve

- C** Christa Hartsook 00:15
Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life. There's one thing we all have in common we all eat and the safety of our food is something we often take for granted, but should be concerned about. from the farm to our plate. There are a lot of safety nets to assure the safety of our food. Today on the small farms podcast, we're talking with Linda naeve about rules that are in place to assure our produce is safe. Linda is an extension specialist in value added agriculture at Iowa State University and a member of the ISU food safety team and the North Central Region center for FSMA. Training, extension and technical assistance. Linda, welcome to the show.
- L** Linda Naeve 01:06
Thank you. It's good to be here.
- C** Christa Hartsook 01:08
First of all, Linda, can you tell us what FSMA means?
- L** Linda Naeve 01:10
Well, FSMA is the acronym for the Food Safety Modernization Act. This Act was signed into law by President Obama in 2011. And it focuses on the prevention of food safety issues and includes the entire food value chain.
- C** Christa Hartsook 01:26

You know, we read about and we hear about different food recalls or incidents of outbreaks of foodborne illnesses. Is this really as prevalent as they make it sound?

L

Linda Naeve 01:37

Well, they really are Christa, they occur more often than we realize. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 48 million residents in the US suffer from food borne illnesses every year, produce consumed raw is being looked at closely because 46% of the confirmed cases of foodborne illnesses between 1998 and 2008 are associated with fresh produce and nuts. So that's why it's so important. It was the high profile outbreaks of foodborne illnesses associated with the leafy greens, melons and berries that led to the new regulations affecting the fresh produce industry, that regulation, which was the Food and Drug Administration's Food Safety Modernization Act. And I only refer to that from now on as FSMA in our conversation, but it was those outbreaks that really created the problem. And we needed a solution for. Our team here at Iowa State is working on grower training and compliance of the Produce Safety Rule, which is for us a very big part of FSMA. This produce safety rule regulation focuses on setting the first ever regulatory standards for the production, harvest, and handling of fruits and vegetables, not just the production aspects, but the whole value chain of fruits and vegetables. This rule and its compliance is a major effort to prevent microbial contamination and reduce foodborne illnesses associated with our fresh produce.

C

Christa Hartsook 03:08

So Linda, you mentioned that there is this North Central Region center for the FSMA training, extension and technical assistance. Can you tell me a little bit more about that and maybe who are some of the other partners involved?

L

Linda Naeve 03:20

That is a very long title, isn't it, Christa? But that explains all of what we do. Well, in 2016, Iowa State University faculty and staff wrote and received a grant from the Department of Human Service, Food and Drug Administration to house and coordinate this North Central Region center under the guidance of Dr. Angela Shaw. Angela is an assistant professor of food and food science here at Iowa State University. The North Central Regional Center is a partnership between 12 land grant institutions in our region. The states in our region include Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin. So those 12 states make up our North Central region. And our region is one of four FSMA centers around the country. A primary goal of our center here in the North Central Region is to establish a sustainable communication network that connects educators and growers or processors in some cases, through the north central region and to facilitate the collaboration for FSMA compliance training and build this training capacity within our region.

C

Christa Hartsook 04:37

Okay, so then where can growers and individuals go to get more information about FSMA and maybe some of the resources your Center is developing Linda?

L Linda Naeve 04:46

Well, the center has developed a very comprehensive website that contains a monthly public newsletter for information regarding changes, new things that came out regarding training and compliance and in this up to date news is regarding the Produce Safety Alliance trainings, survey results that we've taken as a result of our grant and other information and resources about compliance requirements and dates. The website address is really easy. It's NCRFSMA, dot org sort of north central region fsma.org. All the acronyms NCRFSMA.org.

C Christa Hartsook 05:26

Easy to remember. So besides coordinating the NCR FSMA center, ISU extension specialists I know on campus and off campus are also partnering with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. Can you tell me a little bit more about those efforts?

L Linda Naeve 05:43

Well, yeah, Christa, we are partnering and they're very good partners with this project, with efforts to deliver grower trainings and on farm readiness reviews for producers to be in compliance with the Produce Safety Rule. The Produce Safety Rule is a new word. That new term that we've used in this podcast is part of the FSMA and it is regulation that focuses on setting the first ever federal regulations. The FDA FSMA Produce Safety Rule mandates that commercial fruit and vegetable growers complete training developed by produce safety Alliance. These topics in the daylong training include things like water testing, frequency and methods, biological soil amendments of animal origin, worker training, animal management, and equipment, tools and facilities. The instructors of these courses are trained and well equipped and prepared because they are required to have gone through an extensive training in order to teach these courses. So not only are you getting great information by attending these sessions that will help you on your farm become compliant, but also the instructors for the course are our experts in the area.

C Christa Hartsook 06:56

Okay. So Linda, I know we have a lot of produce farmers out there. Will they all have to comply with these new rules?

L Linda Naeve 07:05

Well, Christa some farms are eligible for exemptions from FSMA, the Produce Safety rule based on the commodities grown sales volume or processing activities, and I'll go into these in a little bit more detail. But these commercial growers may meet the exemption criteria, and do not need to comply at this time. But really, it's important that they understand this and comply because it will be mandatory in the future. The Produce Safety Rule is just good practices really for all farms, although many small scale producers are not currently required to comply. The

Produce Safety affects every fruit and vegetable grower, even if there was no regulatory or market pressure, produce safety is really critical to every grower because they produce foods that consumers eat.

C Christa Hartsook 07:55

Absolutely. And we want to make sure we're providing the safest product possible. So how will the farmer know then Linda, if he or she needs to comply and needs to attend this training or if they're exempt?

L Linda Naeve 08:07

Well, the Produce Safety rule provides four exemptions. And these can be worked together or separately. These include farms that one grow produce that is used only for personal or on farm consumption. So in other words, they don't sell it. Secondly, they grow only agricultural commodities that are not typically consumed raw, including food grains. So if you go, let's say, potatoes, and that's all you grow, that's not typically consumed raw. So that makes your farm exempt, or three, they sell produce with an average annual value during the previous three year period that totals 25,000 or less. So again, if averaged over three years you sell less than \$25,000 in produce, you will be exempt to begin with. The rule also provides a fourth exemption for produce that is commercially processed with a kill step. So let's say you're growing tomatoes for a processor that's going to be canned. That goes through a kill step process. And it makes your crop your farm exempt from the Produce Safety Rule. This processing adequately reduces the presence of micro organisms that can have a healthy impact on food safety. So the kill step is important there. So any combination of those things that can be rather complicated, but you can get more detailed information on the North Central Region FSMA website, again, NCRFSMA dot org or by calling the center and talking to a specialist and walking you through that particular process.

C Christa Hartsook 09:48

Linda As with most federal regulations, there is an implementation deadline. I'm assuming there's some dates that firms will need to be compliant by

L Linda Naeve 09:57

there is Christa and it depends on the size of the farm. Based on the sales of specific produce crops, such as those that are not consumed raw, or consumed raw, excuse me, January 26 2018, is the earliest date for farms that are not considered small or very small. For small businesses, January 26 2019, is the compliance date. And for the very small farm businesses, it's January 26 2020. Okay, now for certain aspects of the rule, such as the water quality standards and related testing and record keeping provisions are giving farmers and added two years beyond each of these compliance dates. Okay, so really, it's often the future, but it's something that really needs to be considered today, tomorrow, and in the not too distant future.

C Christa Hartsook 10:51

You bet. Linda, let's say I'm out there. And this is maybe my first exposure to this as a you know, a commercial fruit and vegetable grower, what is my first step that I really need to look at for my farm to becoming compliant here?

L Linda Naeve 11:05

Well, the first thing to do is attend a training session to get all those questions answered and learn more about the modules the seven parts of that rule that are important. So find this training location near you, they're going on all over our region and all over the country right now. And compliance requires that at least one supervisor responsible party for each farm must successfully complete the one day training. And there are several upcoming trainings for farmers throughout the North Central Region. And they are a bargain right now because many are using grant funds to sponsor these trainings. If you check out the November newsletter on the North Central FSMA website, or on the small farm sustainability website, for dates and locations, you can find them near you. For example, here in Iowa, we have one coming up in Fort Dodge. On November 2, November 9, there will be one in Harlan planned in the schedule November 16. We have one scheduled in Sioux City, Iowa, and on December 7 in Calmar. So all these dates, you can find those and learn more information on how to register on the website.

C Christa Hartsook 12:12

Linda, is there anything else that we really need to know or prepare for at this time?

L Linda Naeve 12:16

Well, just in summary, Christa that this Food Safety Modernization Act is a benefit to all of us, all of us that eat which is all of us. So produce safety is important and our growers are really trying hard to be compliant with this rule now.

C Christa Hartsook 12:31

All right, thank you so much for being on the show today.

L Linda Naeve 12:34

Thank you