



Vegetable and Produce Safety Update

📅 Thu, 5/20 1:55PM ⌚ 19:03

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

farm, crops, irrigation, dry, inspections, year, produce, covered, inspected, hearing, schedule, irrigated, cucumber beetles, qualified, week, field, counts, rain, dan, fisma

SPEAKERS

Christa Hartsook, Joe Hannan, Dan Fillius

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- 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 real life.
 - J** Joe Hannan 00:29
Hi, I'm Joe Hannon, commercial horticulture field specialists with Iowa State University and welcome to the small farm sustainability podcast. With me today is Dan Filius of the ISU Produce Safety team. Welcome back, Dan. How's it going?
 - D** Dan Fillius 00:42
Oh, it's going great. Thank you for asking. It's going really great.
 - J** Joe Hannan 00:46
Good. Good. So well, how spring shaping up for you. I don't know the last what, eight weeks? Oh, yeah, thanks. How are things looking in the field for you?
 - D** Dan Fillius 00:55

Things are, for me personally, at my farm, things are looking very good. This dry weather that we've had has allowed me to get in there without delay and get things planted. And irrigation so far is sufficient I I'm a little undersized with with my supply. And but I don't have my full scale of crops out there in the field yet. So but I've been able to keep up with that. And it's been nice. But I do have concerns that if we don't get rain, that things will fall behind at some point. But corn that is not irrigated is out of the ground. And I I'd say I'm ahead of schedule for that. Where I've been in previous years. So all in all, so far, so good. And in talking with other growers. It's a similar thing where things are going as scheduled. So far, irrigation is keeping up with things but everybody would really like to see some rain help out so that there can be some some tension release, the shoulders can relax for a little bit not have to worry about that irrigation.

J

Joe Hannan 01:57

That's a lot of stress but an irrigation system when we're running it a couple of times a week already in as early as April.

D

Dan Fillius 02:06

Yes, yes. Yes.

J

Joe Hannan 02:08

Yes, that's, that's gonna be taxing. And you know, we're coming into the year, not at full capacity by any means soil moisture, and kind of behind the eight ball a little bit on moisture, which I mean, it's nice for making raised beds and getting stuff in the ground.

D

Dan Fillius 02:26

One thing I've noticed also is that the crop of weeds that is usually overwhelming at this time of year is is really delayed. So it's where waters collecting in the field, is it I can see what could be if we didn't have a rain, and I'm glad to see that those weeds aren't up and the crops are better for it, and my labor for cultivation is better for it. But it's good and bad there.

J

Joe Hannan 02:52

So you said your water system was undersized. What did you mean by that?

- D** Dan Fillius 02:57
Oh, well, I'm connected to Des Moines waterworks, through the spigot on the side of a house. And you know, I've got I guess I've got one acre that is being irrigated out of my four acres. And I'm drip irrigating that and I can only run 2800 linear feet of drip tape off of that before it starts to, you know, at optimal pressure.
- J** Joe Hannan 03:28
Yeah.
- D** Dan Fillius 03:29
But I've got that's like a quarter of what I want to irrigate at any one time. So I just have to just have to think it through and I've got zones and all that, it works. But some times when no rain and high heat comes in the middle of the season. And in order to get, you know, an inch and a half two inches of water on those crops, I need to run that drip for 36 to 48 hours. It doesn't there's not enough days in the week if that dry hot spell lasts for a long time.
- J** Joe Hannan 04:01
It doesn't sound like it's an if it sounds like it's a when common.
- D** Dan Fillius 04:05
I agree.
- J** Joe Hannan 04:05
Everything happened here and May is our best chance for getting water and then and then drying out and going into June/July.
- D** Dan Fillius 04:13
Yeah.
- J** Joe Hannan 04:14
August based on the outlets I've been seeing, you know that that can change but right

now the trend is we need water now because we don't expect it later.



Dan Fillius 04:24

Right. And as I understand it, you know, I'm still of course, understanding weather is is maybe a fool's errand but



Joe Hannan 04:31

Yeah. Haha.



Dan Fillius 04:33

In hearing in hearing the state climatologist Justin Gleason talk, you know, this notion that summer rain is really driven by these thunderstorms. And thunderstorms are fueled the moisture in them is fueled by the moisture in the ground underneath. And so people who you know, get into this cycle of dry and then they see the clouds growing and then at parts they say they feel like a parts around them, you know? Well, the part of that is because the places that are wet, get wetter, and the places that are dry, don't have the moisture to fuel those the rainfall on that direct place. I know it's not that simple. But that's a general pattern that I heard. I've heard him talk about and that reinforces what you're saying about May being our best chance and maybe not great chances after that if we're already dry.



Joe Hannan 05:26

Yeah, my understanding again from Justin was that May is kind of that transition period from those large, huge storms that we see during the wintertime into thunderstorms that you're just talking about. And yeah, once we're dry, the dry stays dry. The wet stays What?



Dan Fillius 05:43

Yeah.



Joe Hannan 05:46

But yeah, so you know, stuff is up stuff isn't weedy? I'm assuming you have very, very little disease pressure out there at all.

- D** Dan Fillius 05:54
None. None. And I have heard some farmers saying they're having a very bad flea beetle season this spring so far on their brassica crops. But personally, I have not seen it at my farm. And I've got everything under row cover as it is. But yeah, I'm not seeing any disease. And I'm not seeing many pests yet at this point. So that's my fingers are crossed for that. I think I'm going to get a really lovely baby bok choy harvest next week from from that, and it's because of the few things that I'm very looking very good.
- J** Joe Hannan 06:29
Yeah, I saw some aphids in some high tunnels early this season, which that's pretty common to see inside the high tunnel. This one completely threw me for a loop though, because it's a brand new building. And it was immaculately cleaned around the building. So I'm not sure where the aphids came from other than you know, we're corn soybean country. So yeah, I'm not sure where they came from.
- D** Dan Fillius 06:52
Interesting.
- J** Joe Hannan 06:53
Yeah, that one's got me baffled a little bit.
- D** Dan Fillius 06:55
That is something that I do need to maybe be looking for. Because I know that I've had what I thought was beautiful crop underneath the row cover before and then I peel the row cover back, you know, after counting on that two weeks before, and then suddenly it's like, oh, my goodness, it is just covered with aphids.
- J** Joe Hannan 07:11
Yeah. And it's it's not hard to scout for aphids. I mean, they're easy to see. And if you're in a high tunnels, look on the opposite side of your prevailing winds.
- D** Dan Fillius 07:20
Okay.

- J** Joe Hannan 07:21
Typically, that's where you'll find them first, you'll find them on the outside perimeters and then that also means you can spot treat. So yes, yeah, so no, no spider mites or anything like that. I think we're too early for that. Beetles will be coming around the block here before we know. Actually, actually, probably by the time this is posted, we should start seeing and hearing our first cucumber beetles and being leafy...
- D** Dan Fillius 07:44
Yes, yeah. Cuz this is mid May, I would have expected that I would see them. But I think the cool weather that we've had this last couple of weeks has limited their emergence. So but yeah, I've got volunteer cucurbits germinating on my farm from last year's pumpkin patch. And and the cucumber beetles are not far behind those coming up.
- J** Joe Hannan 08:06
Yeah, I usually put March 10, March 14 or so for finding them in Southeast Iowa, at Muscatine.
- D** Dan Fillius 08:12
Yeah.
- J** Joe Hannan 08:14
And then showing up fairly quickly thereafter.
- D** Dan Fillius 08:17
Yeah,
- J** Joe Hannan 08:18
So bean leaf beetles probably out or will be out now too. So. Yeah, I don't know anything else you're seeing or anything else ventures out there in the veggie, veggie fields or anything else you're hearing from folks?
- D** Dan Fillius 08:33

I tried to get in touch with, you know, with a grower up in Northeast Iowa to hear how it was going up there because I know they can sometimes be cooler and wetter. But I wasn't able to reach anybody out there who had time to talk and but I've been seeing some social media posts from southeastern Minnesota and northeastern Iowa that similarly dry there this year so far, but it is definitely it is definitely cooler up there.



Joe Hannan 08:56

Yeah, caught me off guard when I was in Waterloo. I was helping my brother with some landscaping. Last weekend, I believe. And you know, we were digging down four or five inches. It's just bone dry.



Dan Fillius 09:08

Yeah.



Joe Hannan 09:08

We're just like 'wow, and you guys had moisture last year and watch the loss.'



Dan Fillius 09:12

Right.



Joe Hannan 09:13

Southeast Iowa seems to be about the only wetspot.



Dan Fillius 09:16

Yeah, exactly. That's Yeah. That's what Dennis Tati was saying. Last week, right?



Joe Hannan 09:21

Yeah. Yeah. So I guess maybe move on. Maybe talk a little bit about Produce Safety. And what's what's actually happening in your job? Yeah, for produce safety right now.



Dan Fillius 09:32

Sure... Well, gosh, we're emerging slowly but surely out of pandemic life. Right.

J Joe Hannan 09:37
Knock on wood!

D Dan Fillius 09:38
I know, thank you for doing that. I'll do it on my end as well. I really do hope that this continues and doesn't we don't have a resurgence. But we're coming off of a winter where all of our trainings that we usually used to do in person were all Zoom based, had a really good turnout for those especially the later ones in February and March. And and I think, I mean if the organization that puts those things together allows for it, because we were able to serve a different slice of our produce community with those, then we will continue to offer one of those, at least each year, I think. Just a person's say, lives in a more remote place, it's difficult for them to get to and they can make it to the Zoom thing. Also, we did them divided over two days. So people could do farm work for half the day, especially the February March time when people are starting up the greenhouses, things like that early, early work, they can do work part of the day and do the Zoom the second half of the day, that worked out for a lot of people.

J Joe Hannan 10:43
It did, even as an instructor was easier to not be zoned into class all day long.

D Dan Fillius 10:51
Right.

J Joe Hannan 10:52
Especially as you were the lead instructor for all of it, you had to pay attention and be there.

D Dan Fillius 10:56
Yes.

J Joe Hannan 10:57
As as a participant, I think that's easier to do. It's a tough class.

D Dan Fillius 11:03
Yes.

J Joe Hannan 11:04
And breaking it out in two days seems to help.

D Dan Fillius 11:06
Yes, yes. Yes, we will still have in person ones going forwards. But I think having that diversity of class type will help. And so we'll see it really it was a pandemic response, why they allowed us to do it in the first place, we'll see if it continues. Inspections were put on hold last year, they were the FDA does our inspections for the farms that are covered by FISMA and get inspected and they inspected the largest farms a couple years back. And mid-September if my memory is correct, and they did not do any inspections, they were scheduled to do the next tier of like mid-sized farms. And so those are going to be happening this year, the FDA inspectors will come out and we'll call farms ahead of time, the ones that they are planning to inspect and schedule those inspections. So farmers if you receive a call, please do call them back or pick up that phone. If if you get it on the first try. But if they don't hear from you or don't talk to you, they will schedule to work with just their schedule and will show up anyway. And so it remains to be seen how many farms are going to be inspected. But since this year was the scheduled year for the smaller sized farms, that one's grossing over 25,000. If I'm not mistaken, those folks who have not been inspected, but know that they are covered by the rule. They are a FISMA regulated farm, regardless of size. I think that are that you should be expecting a call this year, or at least prepared for it.

J Joe Hannan 12:40
Yeah, that was my understanding too Dan, was anybody that is now a covered farm, you know, should be expecting to get inspected this year or next year. But again, it's covered farms. So if you have an exemption or qualified exemption, you won't be getting inspected.



Dan Fillius 12:58

Yep.



Joe Hannan 12:58

You still may get a call and ask to verify but yep.



Dan Fillius 13:02

Yep, yep. You can say Oh, nope, nope, my three year average is less than 25. Okay, yep. You're you're fully exempt. Oh, no more than 50%. You know, I do make gross more than 25,000. But more than 50% are going to qualified end users. And here's why. And here's who they are, like, say that and then you should that should close that conversation. But otherwise, if you are a covered farm, you should expect an inspection this year.



Joe Hannan 13:29

Real quick, who are qualified end users?



Dan Fillius 13:31

Qualified end users are those... I mean, in a nutshell, there are marketing direct to the customer and those customers are local within your states or within gosh...



Joe Hannan 13:43

250 I think.



Dan Fillius 13:44

Okay, 250 miles.



Joe Hannan 13:46

I think



Dan Fillius 13:47

It's still quite a distance. You know, from Des Moines here, I remember, I think I could

market my stuff to Lincoln, Nebraska, Twin Cities almost, and it's a pretty big radius within those. If you've got a larger state. Of course, Iowa is not as large as some but you know, with within state boundaries also counts. But that's CSA customers, farmers market customers, your produce department at your grocery store for any grade. Let's say, for instance, HyVee or Fareway produce department, you go and sell direct to the produce buyer in that store, that's a qualified end user. However, if you are marketing to the distribution center for either those companies, that counts as more of like the middleman relationship and that is not a qualified end user because they would then turn around and ship it in their trucking to to the produce departments. But if you're dealing just with that produce department, that counts. Restaurants, restaurant sales also counts.

J Joe Hannan 14:43

Perfect! And if you were one of those covered farms, what can we at ISU do to help you prepare and be ready for an inspection?

D Dan Fillius 14:55

Oh, yeah. So if you feel like you're not sure what, you know, there's some some wildcards that may be on your farm, you're not sure what the inspector might think of that, we offer a service called an On farm Readiness Review, I like to think of it as a dress rehearsal for a inspection, we with extension will come out a couple of us to your farm and we will walk through all the things that the inspectors for the FISMA inspectors from FDA would look for. And this is a free service. It's confidential. And, you know, we just walk through your production practices, we look at it through our food safety glasses, if you will. And at the end of it, we'll offer three key areas for you to work on to up your game in food safety and Produce Safety. And ideally speaking, if you address those items, then you will have very little to for the FDA to comment about when they come to your farm. So that you can get in touch with us, iowafisma@iastate.edu, we'd be happy to schedule one of those things where at any time, as of now we're happy to come out.

J Joe Hannan 16:15

Cool. So there's options. So, you know,

D Dan Fillius 16:18

Yeah.

J Joe Hannan 16:18
Don't feel like you got to go it alone, we can come out and give you a hand and they'll get you prepared.

D Dan Fillius 16:23
And if you if you feel like that's too much, you don't have two hours of your time to set aside for that I understand. If there's just a certain specific question you have about one thing, we're also happy to get on the phone and talk with you about those things or email back and forth. So again, get in touch with us at iowafisma@iastate.edu

J Joe Hannan 16:48
Perfect like I said, I'll add it to the show notes here so folks can grab it directly. Yeah, so Dan, anything else you want to talk about? Produce side, veggie side?

D Dan Fillius 16:58
No I think that covers it. I'm hopeful that we all have a really positive season, you know, I know that irrigation is that in these dry seasons. It is the the difference maker because you know some of the best crops that I've ever grown have been in these dry years and that was entirely dependent on irrigation. The crops that didn't have irrigation were not great crops, but best onions have ever grown were in a really hot, dry year, but we had irrigation on those things. So I don't know. I don't need to hammer that home. People know this this already.

J Joe Hannan 17:36
And a lot can change. You know, one big storm come through one hurricane pops up, could kind of change all that. So, you know, there's the drought that we're on now, but that doesn't mean that can't change tomorrow. So yeah.

D Dan Fillius 17:49
The weather is never perfect for a farmer is that isn't that true? It's it's either too dry to wet. But Gosh, I'm hopeful that it comes together and we've got a good harvest for everybody this year.



Joe Hannan 18:01

Well Dan, thanks for joining me today. First, thanks to Krista Hartsock and Olivia Hanlon at the ISU Small Farms Sustainability Program for editing and hosting these podcasts. Remember, if you want to join me on the podcast drop me a note. I'd love to have more farmers more people involved in the podcast. And before we sign off today, Dan, what website can we find more information?



Dan Fillius 18:24

Yeah, so that is again, the email address is iowafisma@iastate.edu, but the website for our for our program is www.safeproduce.cals.iastate.edu.



Joe Hannan 18:41

Well thank you, Dan, and thanks, everybody for tuning in today. We'll talk to you next time. Thanks so much, Joe.



Christa Hartsook 18:46

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