

Hunger-Free Community Report

A Resource Guide to Food Safety Practices for Small Growers

Developed for Growing Power's *Future Farmers for Chicago* Partners



Compiled by: C. Kimmi Ramnine
Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow
19th Class
Field Placement: Growing Power- Chicago

Introduction: Incorporating Food Safety into Urban Agriculture Practices

Growing food is an important step in the creation of local food systems, but it is only one of many— as growers we must interrogate our entire food chain from how we market our produce, how we get our produce to those who are most vulnerable in our communities to the safety of our growing practices. Concurrently we are trying to create a sustainable system where production costs are covered by the sale of our produce and where job opportunities are created within our communities.

Growing Power Chicago (GPC) advocates that simply placing a grocery store in a food desert will not eliminate all the conditions that create food deserts. Opportunities for economic development need to be incorporated into the solutions toward community food security. GPC's Iron Street Urban Farm will provide the resources needed to train community residents to be present in markets not previously accessible to small-scale food producers. GPC believes that every actor, from the local growers to the large retail and institutional buyers, must be present and invested to eliminate conditions of hunger and food insecurity. In this manner, our solutions can be truly sustainable.

When GPC first sought out growers to participate in this opportunity to sell to larger retail outlets, it became apparent that although there has been an increase in interest in urban agriculture, there are still very few individuals with the skills needed to participate in this or any other scaled-up market opportunity. So while the benefits to communities are many in urban agriculture, a major challenge lies in the fact that there are not enough farmers trained in successfully producing food within our urban areas. A very unique set of talents and skills are required to successfully begin and, most importantly, sustain a commercial urban agriculture enterprise that will provide food security for local urban communities, but that will also go beyond that goal to begin to stabilize these same communities and move towards economic self-sustainment. It is for this reason why GPC main focus is and continues to be the training of low-income youth and adults in community food system development.

A key component of this initiative to train future urban farmers is the aggregation pilot to develop a community food hub. The successful implementation of this demonstrates that local producers can come together to produce food that is sustainable and wholesome, bring it together at one central location, and distribute it to the outlets in which low-income residents depend on to purchase their food on a daily basis. It breaks the current notion that sustainable agriculture and corporations are unable to effectively work together and that sustainable agriculture does not have the capacity to enter mainstream markets. In fact, this partnership is vital in order to create a food system that is healthy, affordable, and accessible to everyone.

Through GPC's own internal development process, we have learned the establishment of *food safety practices* is necessary for growing farmers' capacity to scale up both their production and marketing capabilities. Many larger retail outlets and institutional buyers require produce providers to have third-part certification ensuring that their growing operation functions under national standards for food safety. Developed by the Agricultural Marketing Service of the USDA, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) audits ensure that a growing/packing operation adheres to the best agricultural practices to produce, pack, handle and store fruits and vegetables with the ultimate goal of minimizing the risk of microbial contamination of produce.

To obtain GAP Certification the growing, packing and/or storage facility must have a written food safety plan with developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) on (if applicable): worker hygiene, harvest sanitation, toilets and hand washing, water usage, pesticide usage, manure use, compost use, wild animals and pest management, post-harvest handling, traceability, farm bio-security and crisis management/ corrective actions. In addition to these SOPs, the operation must also be able to provide documentation to demonstrate continued compliance with their SOPs— the rule being *if you did not record it, you did not do it*. Each operation should develop their own operating procedures in a manner that makes sense for their best function.

This resource guide contains an overview of standardized food safety practices for small urban operations and a guide to useful online resources for the development of food safety practices and a food safety plan. The guide is intended as an introduction to food safety practices and will be most effective when used alongside GPC's technical assistance trainings and support.

Worker Hygiene, Harvest Sanitation and Related Procedures

- ⤴ All field and production workers are trained in all aspects food safety requirements and are trained in proper farm hygiene and food safety.
- ⤴ All field and production workers are required to wash their hands before beginning or returning to work, after using the toilet and after eating and smoking.
 - Proper Handwashing Technique
 - Wet hands
 - apply soap and work up a lather
 - Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds
 - Rinse
 - Dry with a single use towel
- ⤴ Activities such as smoking, eating, gum chewing and drinking (other than water in non-glass sealed bottles in the field) are not allowed where product is stored or handled.
- ⤴ All illnesses or accidents should be recorded and reported designated personnel.
- ⤴ Those with communicable diseases or symptoms of contagious or diarrheal disease are prohibited from handling fresh produce.
- ⤴ Clean drinking water is available to all workers and water quality is tested 1 time per year and records are kept.
- ⤴ Training on proper sanitation and hygiene practices should be provided to all harvesters and handlers at least once each season before harvesting begins. If a worker does not follow acceptable sanitary practices, he/she is verbally corrected and retrained if needed.

Toilet and Hand Washing Facilities

- ⤴ Toilet and hand washing facilities are regularly maintained and supplied was necessary to keep them clean, sanitary and functional.
- ⤴ All hand-washing facilities have an adequate supply of potable water, soap and single-use towels. Each station has a sign that reminds employees when and how to wash hands.
- ⤴ Toilet and hand washing facilities are accessible and located within ¼ mile walk of field (about a 5 minute walk).
- ⤴ Farmworkers are notified of location of the sanitary facilities and water and are allowed reasonable opportunities to use them.
- ⤴ On sites where there is little to no access to potable water, hand-washing stations can be created using two 5-gallon coolers, one with soapy water and the other with regular water.

Harvesting, Field Packing, and Transportation

- ⤴ Measures are taken to prevent microbial and chemical contamination of crops during harvesting, handling and field packing operations.
- ⤴ All harvesting containers and tools that come in direct contact with produce are cleaned and/or sanitized prior to use.
- ⤴ Harvesting containers, totes, etc. are not used for carrying or storing non-produce items during the harvest season.
- ⤴ Transportation equipment that comes in contact with harvested produce must be clean and in good repair.
- ⤴ Harvest and packing containers should not come in direct contact with the ground. Pallets can be used to raise packed produce off the floor.

Facility and Land Use Safety

- ⤴ Before beginning to use any land for growing purposes, a previous land-use risk assessment should be performed noting any potential prior sources for contamination. Soil tests must be performed to determine whether there are unacceptable levels of bacterial activity or heavy metals.
- ⤴ The growing operation is clean and maintained in an orderly manner. There should be little to no foreign contaminants present (ex. pieces of wood, plastic bags etc)
- ⤴ Infant and toddler aged children should not be allowed in the growing area.
- ⤴ Visitors are required to check-in prior to entering growing area.

Pest Management

- ⤴ Measures are taken to exclude animals or pests from growing and packing areas.
- ⤴ If pests are a problem, an established pest control program should be created for the operation.
- ⤴ Domestic, livestock and wild animals are not permitted in the growing area.
- ⤴ Crop production areas are monitored for the presence or sign of wild animals entering the land.
- ⤴ Pesticides and other chemicals (including restroom cleaners) are stored in a secure location.
- ⤴ Pesticides should only be used by someone trained, for the crop and pest intended and only with the frequency determined by the label.
 - A record of of pesticide application must be noted along with time and date.
 - Re-entry/ limited entry signs must be posted after pesticide use.

Manure and Compost Practices

- ⤴ Whenever raw manure is used, it is applied and incorporated into the soil at least 2 weeks prior to

planting and 120 days prior to harvest of crop.

- ⤴ Composted manure is composted and aged adequately to reduce risk of pathogens.
- ⤴ Composted manure is properly stored and protected to minimize contamination.
- ⤴ Composted (non-animal derived) organic waste is composted and aged adequately to reduce the risk of pathogens

Water Quality

- ⤴ Municipal Water is the easiest water source for drinking, irrigation, washing harvested produce, sanitizing containers used to hold harvested produce. It is the most likely water source to meet the potable water quality standards prescribed by the US Environmental Protection Agency.
- ⤴ Potable water is used for irrigation applications that come in direct contact with the edible portion of the crop.
- ⤴ Test results are acquired from the local water authority annually.
- ⤴ On-site water source is tested annually and records are kept.

Traceability and Recall

- ⤴ Your operation should have systems and record in place to enable one step forward (with the exception of direct to consumer sales) and one step back traceability of produces grown on-site.
 - Farm site should be adequately coded by bed and crop to ensure crops can be traced to their origin
 - When packing produce, you should include the following information on the packing container
 - Farm Name
 - Crop Name
 - Date Harvested
 - Farm Contact Information
 - Final Destination
- ⤴ Records should be kept of each sale that includes the harvest location, date of sale, name of buyer and how they can be contacted in the event of a recall.
- ⤴ The operation should document and perform a 'mock-recall' procedure on an annual basis.

Online Resources

FamilyFarmed.org- On-Farm Food Safety Project

onfarmfoodsafety.org

This resource provides technical assistance to fruit and vegetable farmers interested in incorporating the best practices of food safety into their operation. The website includes a free tool for small to mid-size farmers to build individualized food safety plans and requisite record keeping tools.

GAPsNet: Good Agricultural Practices Network for Education and Training

www.gaps.cornell.edu

GAPsNet has a multitude of resources for growers to begin incorporating food safety into their everyday practice including: samples of record-keeping documents; a grower's guide outlining standard GAP requirements; requisite signage and brochures.

Primus Labs (3rd Party GAP Auditor): Food Safety Program Tools

www.primuslabs.com/Services/StandardGAP.aspx

Primus labs offers a number of free food safety preparation tools including a personalized food safety plan developer including required documentation logs. Their rubric and scoring requirements are available for all to see so growers can fully anticipate what an auditor will explore.

USDA Agriculture Marketing Services: Grading Certification and Verification

www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/gapghp

USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Fruit and Vegetable Program, Specialty Crops Inspection (SCI) Division Audit Programs offers voluntary independent audits of produce suppliers throughout the production and supply chain. The Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) audits focus on best agricultural practices to verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored in the safest manner possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. The audit is based on industry standards for best practices.

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

Publications: Food Safety FAQ (Jun 11); A Sustainable Agriculture Perspective on Food Safety (Nov 10)

<http://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/NSAC-Food-Safety-FAQ-June-2011.pdf>

http://sustainableagriculture.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/NSAC_Sustainable-Food-Safety_FINAL1.pdf

The Food Safety FAQ details the impact of the Food Safety Modernization Act and its requirements for growers and producers. The document summarizes the differences between the regulations for smaller growers and manufacturers.

The Sustainable Agriculture Perspective on Food Safety begins with an summary of intersections of food safety and sustainability. The publication notes that GAPs are simply one part of food safety and continues to outlines 16 tenets for sustainable food systems.