

FAQ: BUILDING A COMPREHENSIVE WORKER TRAINING PROGRAM

This document is helpful for employees tasked with the development and implementation of training programs and addresses common questions they may have as they develop and implement a training program.

1. How often should I conduct worker training?

Regular and consistent training is essential to ensure workers understand and follow food safety practices. Training should not be seen as a one-time event but as an ongoing process that reinforces good health and hygiene habits, adapts to new risks, and keeps employees informed of regulatory or operational changes. Consider the following when conducting worker training:

- Conduct initial training for new hires before they begin working.
- Conduct refresher courses annually or when new regulations or risks emerge.
- Schedule short, frequent training sessions (e.g., periodic tailgate meetings, weekly or monthly training) to reinforce key practices and address any observed issues.
- Update training materials to reflect changes in regulations, farm practices, or emerging food safety risks.

2. What consideration should I take when creating a structured curriculum covering key food safety topics?

When developing a training program, it's important to design a curriculum that is practical, easy to follow, and directly connected to daily work activities. A well-structured curriculum ensures that workers not only learn the key principles of food safety but also understand why these practices matter and how to apply them consistently in the field. Topics should cover biological, chemical and physical risks, proper hygiene and health practices, and clear guidance on safe handling of tools, equipment, and produce.

- Tailor the program to the specific crops, processes, and risks associated with your operations.
- Describe human pathogens, their primary sources, and how they may contaminate produce crops.
- Personal hygiene – emphasize proper handwashing technique, sanitary facility use, glove/hairnet use and replacement, wearing clean clothing, and avoiding contact with animals.

FAQ: BUILDING A COMPREHENSIVE WORKER TRAINING PROGRAM

- Health – what to do when you do not feel well or are sick.
- Which behaviors are inappropriate in the field (e.g., gum chewing, tobacco use, eating food, drinking beverages other than water, spitting, blowing your nose, cleaning a wound, etc.)
- Physical hazards such as jewelry and items in shirt or jacket pockets.
- Hand-held tools use (i.e., avoid contact with the soil, where to store tools during breaks, when and how to clean and sanitize).
- Proper handling of produce (i.e., gently to avoid bruising or damage; avoid contact with the ground).
- Recognizing signs of animal activity in the field (e.g., feces, tracks, damaged plants).
- Assessing the condition of harvest containers, harvest equipment, packaging materials.
- Harvesting equipment cleaning and sanitation.

3. How can I ensure training is clear, accessible, and practical for all workers?

Effective training goes beyond sharing information — it requires delivering content in ways that workers can easily understand, remember, and apply on the job. To achieve this, training should be interactive, tailored to workers' language and literacy levels, and reinforced with practical demonstrations. Incorporating cultural awareness and hands-on learning methods helps ensure that workers not only know the rules but also feel confident putting them into practice in real-world situations.

- Deliver training in the workers' primary language(s).
- Use simple, visual aids like diagrams, videos, or posters to illustrate concepts (e.g., proper handwashing techniques or how to identify contaminated produce).
- Adapt training to accommodate different literacy levels, using more visuals or oral instruction for workers with limited reading skills.
- As much as possible incorporate hands-on demonstrations to reinforce learning, (e.g., show how to wash hands thoroughly, clean tools or equipment).
- Use real-world scenarios and role-playing to simulate situations (e.g., identifying produce that should not be harvested or packed).

FAQ: BUILDING A COMPREHENSIVE WORKER TRAINING PROGRAM

- Provide access to resources like multilingual food safety posters or quick-reference guides in work areas.
- As much as possible conduct on-the-job training to show workers how to apply food safety practices in their daily tasks.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences that may affect workers' understanding of food safety (e.g., varying hygiene practices or attitudes toward reporting illness).
- Encourage questions and discussions to address specific concerns or cultural differences.

4. Why is it important to emphasize the “why” behind food safety practices?

Worker training should include a description of the bigger picture of what happens when produce is contaminated. Training should help workers understand that practices are not just a list of rules to follow but that they are an important part of delivering safe produce to their communities and to consumers across the country and around the world.

- Explain the importance of food safety to workers (i.e., protecting consumer health, preventing outbreaks, and maintaining the company's reputation and financial viability).
- Connect practices to real-world consequences (i.e., hospitalization or death vulnerable populations, the man-hours for and cost of recalls) to motivate adherence.

5. How can I verify worker understanding and compliance with training?

Training is only effective if workers retain the information and consistently apply it in their daily tasks. To ensure food safety principles are being followed, employers should actively monitor and assess both knowledge and behavior. This includes evaluating workers immediately after training, monitoring performance on the job, and reinforcing accountability through clear expectations, corrective actions, and positive reinforcement.

- Use quizzes or practical assessments after training sessions to verify workers' understanding and retention of food safety principles.
- Directly observe workers on the job to verify they are following the food safety practices they were taught.
- Establish an incentive program to reward positive behavior and clear consequences for non-compliance.

6. What training should supervisors receive to effectively oversee food safety?

Supervisors play a critical role in translating food safety standards into daily practice. Because they are responsible for guiding workers and monitoring compliance, their training should go beyond basic requirements. Supervisors must be equipped with advanced knowledge, practical skills such as effective communication, and leadership tools that allow them to model proper behaviors, identify risks in the field, and take corrective actions when needed. Providing supervisors with structured, standardized training ensures they are prepared to maintain high food safety standards and foster accountability throughout the operation.

- Supervisors should receive training in a course that is based on or equivalent to FDA-recognized standardized curriculum.
- Train supervisors to model and enforce food safety practices, such as monitoring handwashing compliance or ensuring proper handling of produce.
- Assign supervisors to conduct regular behavioral checks and provide immediate feedback to workers.
- Train supervisors how to conduct an environmental assessment of the production area and the use of adjacent and nearby land.
- Train supervisors how to verify antimicrobial agent levels in water.
- Train supervisors on implementing mitigation and corrective actions to appropriately address circumstances and events that could potentially cause product contamination.

7. What records should I keep regarding training?

Maintaining thorough records of worker training is essential for demonstrating compliance with food safety regulations and for verifying that all employees have received the instruction needed to perform their tasks safely. Records also provide a reference point for tracking training frequency, ensuring consistency across the workforce, and identifying when refresher training may be needed.

- At a minimum, record:
 - Training date(s)
 - Topics covered
 - Person(s) trained
- Records must be reviewed, dated, and signed by a supervisor or responsible party.