Development of an online food safety training for employees of university farms and school gardens

After the development of two online-food safety videos, activities, and instructor guides, a survey was provided to one elementary school, one high school student, and two universities to determine the impact of the developed material. Through this survey, the team determined several updates needed to make the developed materials more effective for the youth and young adult audience.

What was done and why?

The number of school gardens in Iowa is increasing dramatically, yet most of the workers in these gardens have little or no food safety training. Likewise, university research farm staff work with researchers from different disciplines and attempt to answer a host of questions related to fruit and vegetable production, yet there is little or no food safety training available about good agricultural practices. These produce items grown in school gardens and on university farms could constitute high-risk products for food safety. End products from both school gardens and university farms are placed directly into the hands of students or consumers, potentially placing these populations at risk.

With an increasing number of foodborne outbreaks associated with unprocessed produce, the risk of sparking an outbreak falls onto the school district and university. A critical need exists to develop specialized food safety training that will result in behavior change by produce growers and mitigate risk for the school district and university.

The project objective was to develop two specialized one-hour, on-farm food safety educational modules and user manuals. Their use will lower the risk of having a foodborne outbreak due to lack of knowledge and training for workers.

What did we learn?

The project results offer outreach and collaborative opportunities for many different people in the Iowa State University system and beyond. The resulting modules and user manuals will be shared throughout the state with partners such as FFA and 4-H educators, state agencies involved with Farm to School programs, Master Gardeners, school district and child nutrition program administrators, and higher education institutions’ farm managers. Project findings also will be shared with other out-of-state food safety extension specialists engaged with on-farm outreach efforts and that also have active farm to school programs and/or university research farms. Iowans can use the products of this project to educate their local schools, community gardeners, community colleges and universities on safe handling of produce.