Michigan Food & Farming Systems-MIFFS

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Final Performance Report
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PROJECT TITLE
Food Safety Education for Michigan’s Specialty Crop Producers

PROJECT SUMMARY
While specialty crop producers are taking steps to keep their food crops safe, we have learned through our training sessions and conversations with growers that there is still confusion about good food safety practices on the farm and how to prepare and implement plans that can be certified by an auditor. The purpose of this project is to provide food safety education for Michigan’s specialty crop, direct market and wholesale producers at a variety of scales and knowledge levels. The overall goal is to reduce the risks of microbial contamination of fruits and vegetables produced by Michigan’s specialty crop producers.

A good understanding of food safety risks is important, in addition to more formalized Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and Good Handling Practices (GHPs) plans to minimize the risk of food contamination at the farm and processing levels. GAPs are largely focused on field production and harvest conditions while GHPs are focused more on postharvest handling and processing. Both are commonsense approaches to reducing the contamination risks associated with bacteria, viruses and parasites that cause human illness. Understanding the “why” and “how” of implementing food safety, good agricultural and handling practices are necessary for any farm operation functioning in today’s food system. The GAP training complements previous SCBG training. The training for this project was held in different geographical locations than the previous year to help train additional growers.

PROJECT APPROACH
During this agreement, MIFFS conducted three food safety training sessions in Michigan (Lapeer, Kalamazoo, and Traverse City) and developed a one stop food safety website to help growers develop their food safety plans. Sysco Food Services, long-time food safety partner, invited MIFFS staff to attend and evaluate a GAP session on March 22, 2011 in Cleveland, Ohio. Because of that experience, MIFFS will be modifying their workshop content and format to better serve the audience targeted by this grant. Sysco is interested in cosponsoring more training sessions for 2012 and offered corporate resources to make this happen. This was the first year that MIFFS worked with US Foodservice as a workshop presenter. Their Michigan representative and food safety expert from Chicago to co-present at one of the training session. This is a new partnership that will help more MI producers sell fruit and vegetables to US Foodservice.

Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Environmental Stewardship Division is creating a “Food Safety-A-Syst” unit that will augment existing tools currently available to growers who desire to assess risks and take voluntary action. This tool was developed to help growers and is based on the GAP training that MIFFS has done.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Program Goals: Assemble Training Planning Team
Indicators (outcomes/outputs):
Plan workshops (w/s)
Assist in facilitation
Debrief workshops
Plan mock audit
Debrief mock audit
Data Source: Meeting minutes
Performance Standard: Meet monthly for planning, then as needed/post grant events.
Revised educational materials

**Results:** Worked with MSUE, MDARD and wholesale distributors to develop updated training materials.

**Program Goals:** Assemble Website Development Team

**Indicators (outcomes/outputs):** Oversee development and launch of new website

**Data Source:** Meeting minutes

**Performance Standard:** Meet monthly until launch. Launch by fall of 2011.

**Results:** The team did not meet as often as planned and the MIFFS webmaster was on maternity leave during part of the grant period. As a result, the beta site was not ready for testing/preview by end users as early as expected. Scheduling and input with multiple partners was difficult.

**Program Goals:** Collaborate with partners to promote and test project activities; Increased ability of partners to assist growers; Strengthened relationships between MIFFS and partners

**Indicators (outcomes/outputs):** Feedback from end users collected to design food safety website

- All specialty crop producers will be aware of w/s and new website. Strengthened ability of partners to serve specialty crop growers. Stakeholders will continue to partner with MIFFS and support ongoing food safety efforts.

**Data Source:** Stakeholder Survey

**Performance Standard:**
- Attendance at five grower events.
- 100% of partners will have increased knowledge about farm food safety
- 75% of partners will have an increased ability to assist growers.
- 100% of partners will feel that this project has strengthened their relationship with MIFFS.

**Results:** Promotion/exhibits were conducted at (3) sites: Northern Michigan Small Farms Conference, Michigan Family Farm Conference and Great Lakes Expo/Meet Buyer event. 43% of partners did not know about displays and the beta site was not ready for testing at these events. 86% of partners will use the educational materials to assist specialty crop producers with farm food safety issues and 57% feel they can help producers write Farm Food Safety Plans

**Program Goals:** Conduct farm safety beginner and advanced level workshops, Conduct a two-part webinar, Conduct an on-farm mock audit

**Indicators (outcomes/outputs):** Increased number of growers who complete farm food safety plans, self audits and certified audits if necessary, Increased number of growers obtaining assistance for above, Certified grower will lead one on-farm audit.

**Data Source:** - Attendance lists and Post workshop interviews with producers

- Stakeholder Survey
- Participant Survey

**Performance Standard:**
3 traditional workshops
One webinar
One on-farm mock audit
350 participants
5 topic areas
One producer speaker/session
(Long term – 2012)
35% of specialty crop growers attended one of the sessions
175 Farm Safety Plans completed
70 Farm Safety Audits completed
70 Certified Audits completed

**Results:** Workshops were held in Kalamazoo, Lapeer and Traverse City. An on-farm mock audit was conducted at Apple Schrams Orchard. Attendance at all workshops was below projections (67 total). The mock audit had high participation and 71% of stakeholders rated it Good to Excellent; almost half (43%) identified it as the most effective project activity. Upon completion of project activities, 71% of partners have a better understanding of what is needed to conduct an on-farm audit. No Participant Survey was completed for the mock audit.
**Program Goals:** Launch and evaluate a Farm Safety website  
**Indicators (outcomes/outputs):** Increased number of growers utilizing farm food safety materials and resources for farm food safety planning and audits.  
**Data Source:**  
- Survey of web users  
- Count # of hits  
- Interview with webmaster.  
**Performance Standard:** (Long term) 5,000 specialty crop producers using site.  
**Results:** www.mifarmfoodsafety.org was launched by December 2011. Feedback from beta site indicates that the content is easy to navigate, provides valuable resources and answers questions about food safety certification. Google Analytics indicates that hits on the food safety WebPages has increased by nearly 40%. In the long term, will be able to track the hits with the Google Analytics.

**Program Goals:** Increase market access and competiveness of Michigan specialty crop growers  
**Indicators (outcomes/outputs):** Michigan specialty crop growers will have enhanced ability to expand into new or existing markets because timely and important farm food safety information/trends were shared.  
**Data Source:** Stakeholder Survey  
**Performance Standard:** *90% of stakeholders will feel that their support of this project has enhanced the competitiveness of Mi specialty crop producers.  
*90% of stakeholders will feel that their support of this project has increased market share of Mi specialty crop producers.  
**Results:** 75% of partners feel that as a result of supporting this project, they have increased the competitiveness advantage of specialty crop producers and 56% feel that they have enhanced the ability of specialty crop producers to increase market share.

**BENEFICIARIES**
This grant project was year three of a multi-year approach to educate specialty crop producers on food safety topics. With the exception of conducting advanced-level workshops, MIFFS completed their plan of work within the time frame allotted, including three beginner level workshops, an on-farm mock audit, a webinar/video workshop, and launching of a food safety website. Demographic information from workshop evaluations indicates that participants represent smaller farms in terms of size with an average of approximately 65% farming 100 acres or less. Overwhelmingly, the majority of participants are not currently GAP certified. A small percentage is in the process of becoming certified.

Responses from stakeholders have verified that their knowledge about food safety and attitudes towards food safety issues has improved. Specifically, 75% of partners feel that as a result of supporting this project, they have increased the competitive advantage of specialty crop producers and 86% will be providing resources to support specialty crop producers in the development of farm food safety plans.

Long term outcomes are more difficult to assess (see comments below) It is unknown how many producers have completed farm food safety plans this year, or in previous years as a result of these specific project activities. Project partners/stakeholders believe that MIFFS is doing good work and that organizations are working together to reach Michigan’s specialty crop producers and that can (continue to) happen with continued communication and collaboration.

Attendance was down at workshops this past year, signifying that it may be time to move to more specific or advanced topics such as traceability; however 56% of partners disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that “we have reached a majority of specialty crop producers with educational workshops”. Additionally, 86% of workshop participants indicated that they would attend more workshops on this topic.
MIFFS struggles with identifying ways and means to assist producers in writing farm safety plans and prepare for certification. The mock audits have been identified as a valuable tool in achieving the latter. Based on workshop evaluations, attendees identified the farmer aspect of the workshops as most valuable. They continue to request more interaction time with producers who are in the process of certification, or who have completed audits.

Currently, there is no written plan for how the new Food Safety website will be maintained and who will develop and update content in the future. This needs to be addressed so that the website stays current and valuable to specialty crop producers. Going forward, MIFFS needs to have strong project leadership and continuous input and involvement from leaders and stakeholders. This will keep everyone on task and ensure that grant objectives are completed in a timely manner. Using Google Analytics on the new site at www.mifarmfoodsafety.org when it is launched will help track usage and value to end users.

For program improvement purposes, MIFFS should involve an evaluator from the onset of their project. An evaluator’s first responsibility is to devise a Project Evaluation Plan with goals, indicators, data sources and performance indicators relative to the plan of work. This completed Evaluation Plan dictates how and when evaluation data is obtained and guides the subsequent implementation of tasks. Once post project data is entered and analyzed, this document becomes a helpful resource and planning tool for the next phase of the project.

Although the major activities in this grant were performed as planned, the evaluation tools are not formatted to collect data that corresponds with goals and performance indicators. For example, the goal of the workshops is to increase knowledge of specialty crop growers about GAP, GHP and food safety plans, however, the workshop evaluation does not ask a knowledge-based question. A sample question to add to the workshop evaluation form is shown below:

**How likely or unlikely are you to do the following as a result of participating in this program?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Likely</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Very Unlikely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Develop an on-farm food safety plan within a year ..........</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To assist in follow up and program improvement, a complete list (name, phone, email, etc) of attendees must be collected for each event.

Finally, there is currently not a mechanism in place to determine if program participants have changed their long-term behavior as a result of these activities, i.e., completed farm safety plans, self audits, or certified audits within a year. To track these outcomes and assess progress towards long term goals, MIFFS should identify a partner or partners who could collect and share this data. By doing so, they could also realize an added benefit of demonstrating to current and future funders their ability as an organization to monitor and achieve continuous improvement.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

**Food Safety Audit Tools**

From experience, MIFFS now uses USDA GAP as the primary audit teaching tool. All food safety audits are 85% the same, but each company has different requirements of their customers. In Michigan, most of the fruit and vegetable commodity organizations and leadership are promoting USDA GAP in order to harmonize one audit in the state to help growers. MIFFS feels comfortable using USDA GAP as a training baseline, but does emphasize to workshop participants that they find out what their customer requires and make necessary changes. Last year, MIFFS had Primus present during workshops to give another third party auditor point of view; however, based on workshop evaluations, this section was cut from the program. They continue to promote Primus in their resources since they have a useful self-audit on their website.

**Food Safety History and Overview**

A short history and overview of how food safety has evolved, especially over the last 12 years, is helpful and should be included in future workshops. Specific information on 1) how recalls affect the industry and 2) why companies started getting serious about food safety plans within the supply chain is important to
attendees. Examples could include strawberry, spinach and peanut recalls and their economic impacts (the peanut company did not have a good food safety plan in place and 3,200 people are unemployed because the company did not survive the recall).

**Food Safety from a Local Point of View**
Finding someone to talk about the importance of local food and how businesses and their customers are assured safe food is a new addition MIFFS should consider. Michigan needs to look at food and farming issues from the municipal side of things and educate local planners/zoning administrators on what GAP could mean for their local community. GAP regulations could be in conflict with existing zoning statutes as was discovered in the northeast region.

**Trace Back and Record Keeping**
Not enough time was spent on this section and it needs to be more of an emphasis for producers. A longer session would help producers minimize their risk in case there was a recall of any size or nature. MIFFS continues to pursue funding that would allow them to do sessions on traceability.

**Identifying the Target Audience**
With the third year of workshops completed, the number of growers needing food safety education is shrinking. One area that has not been targeted is cooperatives and the members within a cooperative who sell fresh produce. MIFFS has already initiated discussions on how to reach this target audience in the next project grant cycle.

**On Farm Mock Audits**
MIFFS conducted one on-farm mock audit in this grant cycle and learned that the session was extremely helpful to participants. The recommendation going forward is to do an on-farm mock audit in conjunction with each workshop.

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**FINANCIAL RECONCILIATION**

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<th>Category</th>
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<th>Reimbursement Request 2011-03-30</th>
<th>Reimbursement Request 2011-12-31</th>
<th>Final Reimbursement Request 2011-12-31</th>
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Receipts- Attachment A, B, C, D, E
- Salaries and Fringes- receipts A
- Travel- receipts B
- Materials and Supplies- receipts C
- Contracts- receipts D
- Other- receipts E

Appendices- Attachment F

Evaluation Tools
1. Stakeholder Survey (Annotated instrument)
2. Stakeholder Survey template
3. Attendance Record template

Educational Materials
a. Good Agricultural Practices.ppt (MSUE)
b. USDA Audit
c. Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) Internet Resources
d. Food Safety Auditors (MSU Product Center)
e. Checklist of Potential On-Farm Food Safety Risk (MSUE)
f. Creating a Field Map with Google Maps (MSUE)
g. Illustrated Guide to Growing Safe Produce on Your Farm (National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service).
h. GAP material (Du Russels' Potatoe Farms Inc.)
i. Wholesale Success Manual (Family Farmed.org)
j. Sample Audit (MSUE and Michigan Agriculture Commodity Marketing Association-Apple Division.)