
2023 Produce Safety Program Report

2/6/2024





Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Produce Safety Program
625 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55155
Phone: 651-539-3648
ProduceSafety.MDA@state.mn.us
www.mda.state.mn.us

As required by MINN. STAT. 3.197: This report cost approximately \$500 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, Braille or audio recording. Printed on recycled paper.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this information is available in alternative forms of communication upon request by calling 651-201-6000. TTY users can call the Minnesota Relay Service at 711. The MDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate the produce farmers across the state who responded to the 2023 Grower Questionnaire, attended our grower trainings, or provided feedback through customer service surveys. We also thank the many partners within and outside of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) who contributed knowledge, stories, and data that are included in this report.

Produce Safety Program Overview

Established in 2016 as part of a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the MDA Produce Safety Program works to help produce farms implement and follow the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR). The program works through relationships with farmers, educators, and agricultural organizations across the state to ensure that:

All Minnesota produce farmers receive the resources and support they need to grow safe food while meeting any regulatory requirements that apply to their farms.

Goal 1: Provide Timely Risk-Based Regulatory Services

In 2023, a total of 46 inspections were completed as shown in Table 1. The observations most cited from the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) as depicted in Figure 1, included implementing effective cleaning and sanitizing of food contact surfaces, equipment, and tools (21 CFR 123.123), providing readily available handwashing stations for employees (21 CFR 112.130), maintaining complete and accurate records (21 CFR 112.161) and using hygienic practices to protect against contamination of produce or food contact surfaces (21 CFR 112.32). The Produce Safety Program continues to focus on education to support farms to improve food safety inspection outcomes.

Most frequently cited observations on covered farms in 2023

Figure 1. The most frequently cited observations from all inspections completed in 2023.



Farmer spotlight

Charles Fields, Director of Operations
 Ed Fields and Sons, Inc
 Andover, MN

“Our interaction with the MDA has been beneficial to our farm in a multitude of ways. As a result, we've made positive changes to our maintenance plans, cleaning and sanitation program, as well as our overall food safety implementation strategy. By identifying areas of improvement, while having high standards, our farm is well-positioned and determined to continue prioritizing food safety as a part of our everyday culture.”



Table 1: Types of Inspections Completed in 2023

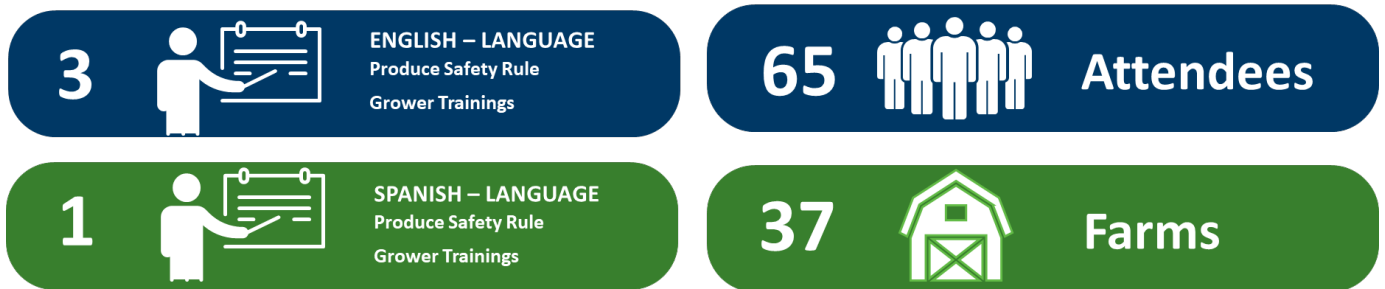
Type of Inspections	Inspection Description	Total Number in 2023
Routine Inspections	On-farm annual visit to review all food safety components under PSR	34
Initial Inspections	Initial on-farm inspection to review all food safety components under PSR mainly for educational purposes	1
Follow-up	To determine if previously issued observations have been corrected	4
Complaint	Conducted in response to a complaint from outside the Produce Safety Program	4
Investigation	Targeted inspection to assess a specific possible concern	1
Consultation	Joint sprout inspection with FDA	2
Total Inspections Completed	All inspections from 2023 growing season	46

Goal 2: Provide Services to Enhance On-farm Food Safety for Produce Farms

Inspections focus on a small subset of produce growing farms within Minnesota. Expanding food safety services directly aligns with the MDA Food and Feed Safety Division vision to protect public health effectively and efficiently, by improving educational and financial opportunities as well as enhanced customer services to all produce farms. The Produce Safety Program offers services that provide financial support through the mini-grant and educational opportunities. As shown in Figure 2 a total of 3 English language PSR Grower trainings were completed and 1 Spanish-language training. Of the four classes, there were 65 attendees and 37 farms.

Produce Safety Rule Grower Trainings

Figure 2: Produce Safety Rule Grower Trainings by the numbers in 2023.



Grower training attendee feedback

“That was a lot of info, but I feel like I understood well and now have the notes to come back to!” – Anonymous
“Thanks for sharing the tips and tricks you have learned at your own farm!” – Anonymous
“Very grateful for this resource!” - Anonymous

Mini-grant

The Produce Safety Program mini-grant, funded through the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, offers awarded growers funding on a reimbursement basis for the purchase of eligible expenses. The expenses most submitted for reimbursement included wax boxes, harvest totes and harvest collection tools. As described in Figure 3, 156 applications were received totaling \$121,234 funds requested. Of those applications, 66 were awarded funds totaling \$32,770, and 85% of the awardees purchased wax boxes or new harvest totes with those funds.

Figure 3: Produce Safety Mini-Grant by the numbers in 2023.



Mini-grant recipient

“As a beginning farmer, I’m still working to scale up my farm business, growing more produce for a greater number of people in my community each year. This money helped ensure we safely fed not only the families who subscribe to our CSA, but also folks who use our local food shelf, where we were able to donate around \$2,700 worth of produce this past summer. Support like this from (the Minnesota Department of Agriculture) helps small farms like mine be more viable and makes it easier for us to get the [food safety] tools we need to go a good job.” - Anonymous

Goal 3: Improve Farm Inventory Data

The Produce Safety Program Grower Questionnaire is a tool developed to help farms identify their status under the PSR and assist the Produce Safety Program in building and maintaining the Produce Farm Inventory.

Farm status

A farm’s status determines their requirements under the PSR and can change from year to year based on markets and sales data. The following data provides an overview of farm statuses for 2023, along with top fruit and vegetable crops reported grown.

Table 2: Total Produce Farms: 2023 MDA Data vs. 2017 Ag Census Data

PSR Farm Status	Status Requirements	MDA Produce Farm Inventory	USDA Estimate	% Verified of USDA Estimate
Covered	Must follow full standards of the rule, farms are subject to a routine inspection	42	308	14%
Eligible for Exemptions	Must keep certain records, farms are not subject to a routine inspection	179	1183	15%
Excluded	Rule doesn’t apply, farms are not subject to routine inspection	770	2137	36%

