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# Produce Safety Annual Report

2025 Annual Report

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## Program Purpose

Since launching the Produce Safety Program in 2016, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), in partnership with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has focused on helping Minnesota produce farms understand and comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR). Nearly a decade later, the MDA continues to provide produce growers with the training, resources, and support needed to grow safe food and meet regulatory requirements, advancing MDA’s mission to promote public health and strong agricultural communities statewide.

In 2024, the FDA finalized Subpart E of the Produce Safety Rule, addressing agricultural water—one of the most significant risk factors in produce safety. With compliance dates beginning in 2025 for large farms, we are now entering a new phase: one where the full rule is in effect, and we can start to see its impact not only in inspections, but in safer practices taking root on Minnesota farms.

## Program Goals and Objectives

The Produce Safety Program worked to reduce food safety risks on Minnesota produce farms by supporting FSMA PSR compliance. Our goals helped the program stay focused on reducing risks, increasing compliance, and delivering support where it was needed most. In 2025, our activities were guided by the following goals:

### Goal 1: Provide timely, risk-based regulatory services

We complete 100% of the annual inspections for all medium and high-risk farms during their peak harvesting periods by the end of the calendar year. Inspection frequencies were based on consistent, proven practices, allowing the program to focus resources where risks were greatest.

### Goal 2: Improve on-farm food safety through education and support

To support on-farm food safety, the inspection process helped growers identify risks and implement corrective

actions. Inspections also helped farms better understand contamination sources and routes, supporting informed decision-making and continuous improvement.

As a direct extension of education provided during on-farm inspections, we also provided FSMA PSR grower trainings, including at least one in-person and one virtual session each year, with non-English and technology-free options as needed. We also offered refresher training resources in multiple formats, including live online sessions, in-person trainings, and self-paced online modules. To further support farms in applying what they've learned from our educational efforts (on-farm and trainings), we offered the Produce Safety Mini-Grant program, which supported them in implementing practical, on-farm improvements.

In 2025, we delivered two FSMA PSR Grower Trainings and maintained at least 80% training coverage among inspected farms. We provided refresher education in multiple formats and awarded mini-grants to at least 35 farms to support food safety improvements.

### **Goal 3: Maintain accurate farm status with updated inventory data**

We verified that 100% of the farms in the Produce Safety Program inventory had accurate information at least once every three years, while also identifying and adding new produce farms for early outreach and education. Data was collected through email, mail, phone, and on-site visits.

## **Program Impact and Outcomes**

### **Goal 1: Provide timely risk-based regulatory services**

- **On-time inspections conducted for 85% of covered farms:** 46 of 54 covered farms, including both routine and initial visits, were completed in 2025. Of the farms that were not inspected, they were lower-risk or newly identified farms, meaning they did not need an inspection during 2025.
- **Reduction in handwashing access issues by 89%:** Findings under 21 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 112.130(a) fell from nine in 2022, peaking in 2023 to 11, to one in 2025, reflecting major improvements in how farms place and maintain handwashing stations to support better worker hygiene.
- **Improvement in training record compliance by 77%:** Findings under 21 CFR 112.30(b) decreased from 13 in 2022 to 3 in 2025. This demonstrates that farms have improved how they document and maintain worker training records, ensuring that food safety training is consistently completed and verifiable.
- **Reduction in orders following targeted follow-up inspections by 75%:** Follow-up inspections at four farms with prior noncompliance showed orders decreased from 20 during routine inspections to five on follow-up inspections, a 75% reduction. All farms improved, with two farms achieving full compliance, demonstrating effective corrective actions addressing key produce safety risk factors such as employee hygiene, sanitation, and environmental contamination.

As shown in Figure 1, the most common issues observed in 2025 involved keeping food and nonfood contact surfaces, equipment, and tools properly cleaned and sanitized; preventing contamination of produce and food contact surfaces from condensate; repeating training when personnel are not meeting the required standards; and providing adequate annual training to all personnel who handle produce or food contact surfaces.

### **Most frequently cited observations on covered farms in 2025**

**Figure 1: The most frequently cited observations from all inspections completed in 2025**



## Goal 2 - Improve on-farm food safety through education and support

- **Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training:** 44 of the 54 (81%) inspected farms have had at least one person complete the Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training, an 8-hour course designed to help farms identify and reduce biological risks to food safety and understand corrective actions. In 2024, 95% of inspected farms completed this training. The decrease in 2025 reflects farms that newly grew into inspected status and have not yet completed the required training.
- **Newsletters:** Five newsletters were distributed in 2025, reaching approximately 4,300–4,700 stakeholders per issue. Engagement was strong, with an average unique open rate of 36%, well above public-sector benchmarks. Across the year, readers consistently interacted with newsletter content, generating 120–220 clicks per issue. This suggests that growers and partners are not only reading but also taking action—accessing guidance, events, training links, or regulatory updates.
- **Support for Beginning Farmers (35% of Applicants):** Thirty-five percent of Produce Safety Mini-Grant applicants (43 of 124) identified as beginning farmers, demonstrating the program’s role in helping new growers implement safer produce handling and hygiene practices early in their operations.

### Mini-grant applicant experiences

"It was very easy—most grants require lots of time to fill out!" – anonymous

"The process was very straightforward. The questions were clear and concise." – anonymous

"Mini-grant helps small farmers to purchase some [things] needed for food safety." – anonymous

## Goal 3: Delivering accurate farm status with improved inventory data

The Produce Safety Program Grower Questionnaire is a tool we developed to help farms identify their status under the PSR and assist the Produce Safety Program in building and maintaining the Produce Farm Inventory. As shown in Figure 2, in 2025, there were 432 responses, as farms are now being asked every three years to complete the grower questionnaire.

- **Reduced grower reporting time by 72% through streamlined data collection:** Use of a pre-populated inventory form reduced survey completion time to approximately five minutes for returning farms,

saving growers an average of 13 minutes compared to first-time respondents and supporting a less intrusive, more efficient reporting process.

- **Early engagement with new produce farms through inventory and outreach:** In 2025, inventory efforts identified approximately 188 potential new produce farms. Through online surveys and follow-up phone outreach, 117 new farms were reached and received education on the Produce Safety Rule and clarification of their coverage status, strengthening early compliance and preventive food safety practices among new operations.

Figure 22: Produce Safety Grower Questionnaire by the numbers in 2025



## Program Outputs

### Goal 1: Provide timely risk-based regulatory services

In 2025, the Produce Safety Program conducted 59 inspections, prioritizing routine (33) and follow-up (4) visits based on farm risk level (Table 1).

Table 1: Types of inspections completed in 2025

Type of Inspections	Inspection Description	Total Number in 2025
<b>Routine Inspections</b>	On-farm annual visit to review all food safety components under PSR	33
<b>Initial Inspections</b>	Initial on-farm inspection to review all food safety components under PSR, mainly for educational purposes	13
<b>Follow-up</b>	To determine if previously issued observations have been corrected	4
<b>Complaint</b>	Conducted in response to a complaint from outside the Produce Safety Program, which may involve sampling	1
<b>Investigation</b>	Targeted inspection to assess a specific possible concern	2
<b>Consultation</b>	Joint inspection with the FDA, where the FDA has oversight	1

Type of Inspections	Inspection Description	Total Number in 2025
<b>On Farm Readiness Reviews</b>	Non-regulatory, confidential visit to a farm to assess a farm’s readiness for compliance with the Produce Safety Rule	5
<b>Total Inspections Completed</b>	All inspections from the 2025 growing season	59

## Goal 2: Improve on-farm food safety through education and support

The Produce Safety Program offers a range of services designed to strengthen food safety practices, including training, educational field days, a program newsletter for farms, and financial support through a mini-grant.

In 2025, we held two FSMA PSR Grower Trainings in English and partnered with the Produce Safety Alliance to support a Spanish-language training. Thanks to this collaboration, Minnesota growers were able to attend the national training at a reduced cost. Across these three sessions, as shown in Figure 3, 32 growers from 26 farms took part, expanding their knowledge and strengthening food safety practices across the state.

**Figure 3: Produce Safety Rule Grower Trainings by the numbers in 2025**



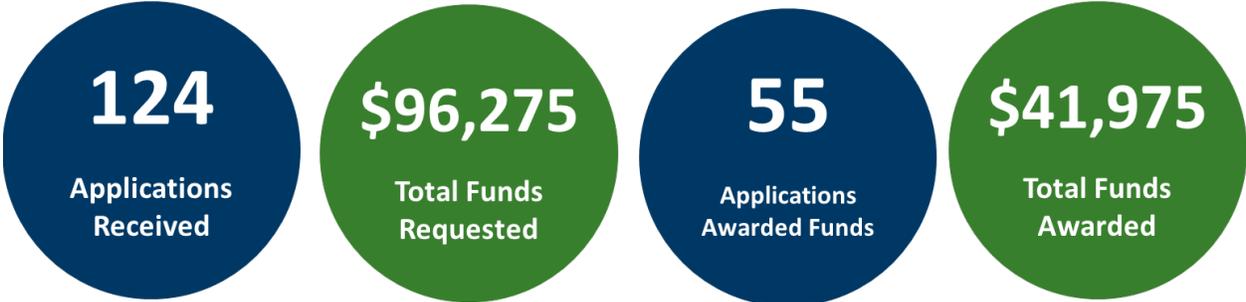
The Produce Safety Program worked to expand refresher training opportunities for growers and farm workers who had already completed the FSMA Produce Safety Rule Grower Training but wanted to strengthen their knowledge and skills. In May, we offered a virtual Spanish-language refresher course. This free training brought together farm owners and workers from both small and large farms, with 22 attendees. Trainers used videos, interactive discussion, and a workbook to revisit core food safety concepts and practical strategies for reducing risk.

Continuing to focus on refresher training, in partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension, four self-paced, online refresher modules were developed in 2025. These short virtual trainings are designed to give growers flexible options to review key aspects of the Produce Safety Rule at their own pace. This refresher video series—covering worker health and hygiene, soil amendments, wildlife and land use, and postharvest sanitation— has received over 200 total views since being released in the autumn of 2025, helping growers reinforce essential Produce Safety Rule concepts and improve compliance through accessible education.

Supporting on-farm food safety also includes targeted financial assistance through the Produce Safety Mini-Grant, which helps farms invest in practical food safety improvements that reduce risk. As shown in Figure 4,

interest remained strong in 2025, with 124 applications requesting nearly \$96,275 in support. Through a lottery process, 55 farms received awards totaling almost \$42,000, with most funds directed toward items such as harvest totes, waxed boxes, and pull wagons and carts. By providing modest, practical support, the mini-grant complements training and outreach efforts, helping farms implement safer practices while maintaining the program’s regulatory focus.

**Figure 4: Produce Safety Mini-Grant by the numbers in 2025**



**Goal 3: Delivering accurate farm status with improved inventory data**

A farm’s status determines its requirements under the PSR and can change from year to year based on markets and sales data. For 2025, the program finalized the process for targeted outreach, including phone calls and farm visits, helping to ensure that farms are accurately assigned. This effort strengthens the Produce Safety Program’s ability to provide tailored education and support. The following data provides an overview of farm statuses for 2025 compared to 2024.

**Table 2: Total Produce Farms: 2024 MDA Data vs. 2025 MDA Data**

PSR Farm Status	Status Requirements	MDA Produce Farm Inventory 2024	MDA Produce Farm Inventory 2025
<b>Covered</b>	Must follow the full standards of the rule; farms are subject to a routine inspection	45	54
<b>Eligible for Exemptions</b>	Must keep certain records; farms are not subject to a routine inspection	207	200
<b>Excluded</b>	The rule doesn’t apply; farms are not subject to routine inspection	791	908

**Program Inputs**

The Minnesota Produce Safety Program was funded primarily through an FDA cooperative agreement, with \$500,211 allocated for FY26 (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026), down from \$551,500 in FY25. This reduction required adjustments to staffing and operations, including a decrease in the unit supervisor role from 0.97 full-time equivalent (FTE) to 0.7 FTE. Additional support included two full-time inspectors, 0.2 FTE for outreach and inventory, and 0.1 FTE administrative support funded through general funds. To address ongoing budget threats,

the program merged operations with the Manufactured Food Program to increase stability and efficiency. Supplemental funding from USDA Specialty Crop Block Grants supported mini-grants, grower trainings, and continuing education efforts.

## Future Goals / Objectives

In 2026, the Produce Safety Program will continue core operations and focus on supporting farms through key transitions, expanding access to voluntary food safety tools, and strengthening program capacity. The goals build on lessons learned in 2025 and reflect our commitment to practical, grower-centered food safety solutions that support both compliance and community-based food systems.

### Top priorities include:

- **Support Subpart E compliance:** Deliver training, technical assistance, and clear guidance to help farms meet new agricultural water requirements.
- **Launch a voluntary produce safety certification pilot:** Develop and pilot a non-regulatory produce safety certification to help small and exempt farms demonstrate safe practices to local buyers—building trust and market access.
- **Strengthen program capacity:** Finalize merger with the Manufactured Food Program and improve internal coordination to maintain service quality amid funding changes.
- **Secure funding:** Obtain the next Cooperative Agreement with the FDA to sustain the capacity to deliver trainings, technical assistance, and resources that support growers in meeting produce safety requirements.
- **Field compliance:** Continue education during inspections to help growers implement safe practices and reduce corrective orders.

## Acknowledgments

This work is only possible because of the farmers and partners who walk alongside us. In 2025, Minnesota produce growers shared their perspectives through the Grower Questionnaire, joined trainings and field days, and offered thoughtful feedback that helps shape our program. We are equally grateful to our partners within and beyond the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, who contributed their time, expertise, and stories, especially the University of Minnesota, which continues to partner with us on education, such as the refresher videos, which take an incredible amount of time. Together, we are building a stronger foundation for food safety and supporting the success of farms across the state.