

Food Safety Partner Farm 2019-20 Program

June 2020



Introduction

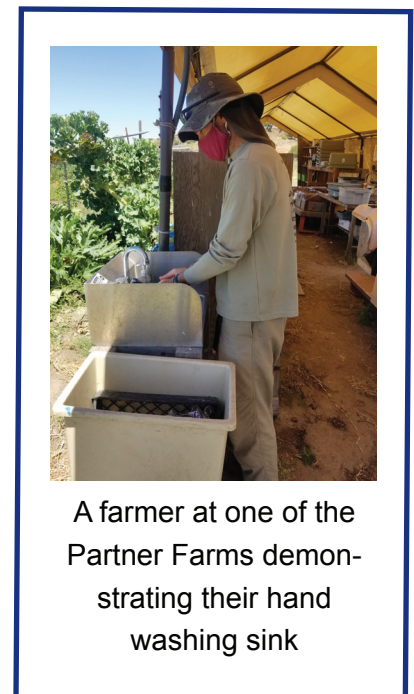
Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) is a non-profit organization that provides farmers throughout California with on-the-ground programs and services as well as policy advocacy. CAFF's Food Safety Program has worked with hundreds of farmers over the years to provide technical assistance. We help farmers navigate complicated state and federal food safety regulations and determine what steps they need to take to get into compliance and reduce their food safety risks on their farm. There is no one-size fits all food safety solution for farmers. Every farm is different and each have their own set of food safety risks. Due to this, CAFF provides a toolbox of food safety resources and services to help farmers in a variety of ways. In addition to our webinars, in-person trainings, factsheets and food safety plan templates on the website, we also a Food Safety Partner Farm Program.

What is the Food Safety Partner Farm Program?

The CAFF Food Safety Partner Farm Program is an in-depth partnership between a farm and the CAFF Food Safety Program staff. Over the course of 3-12 months we work with farmers to help:

- determine what their food safety program goals are for their farm
- develop a plan of action with lots of small steps to achieve those goals
- answer questions along the way
- provide guidance on different options for reducing risks

Once a farm completes their goals we end the program by having the farm host a field day with nearby growers. The farmer(s) share their story with other local growers and they get to see in-person any food safety changes (e.g. wash station design changes) the Partner Farm made during our partnership. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to host field days with the 2019-20 Partner Farm cohort. We've created this report to share highlights that would have been shared at the field day.



A farmer at one of the Partner Farms demonstrating their hand washing sink

Meet the Partner Farms

CAFF partnered with four California farms in the 2019-20 cohort. The farms ranged in size from less than an acre to 30 acres. They grow crops ranging from microgreens to almonds to mixed vegetables. Farm crew size ranged from one person to five people, depending on the farm. Turn the page to learn more specifics about Wild Dog Farm, Good Humus Farm, S & B Ranch, and Agua Dulce Farm.

Our Partner Farms

Good Humus Farm

Location: Capay, CA
Acres in cultivation: 30
Employees: 5

Markets: farmer's markets, CSA, local restaurants
Crop(s): mixed vegetables, over 200 varieties
Before the CAFF Partner Farm Program did you know what you needed to do to be in compliance with FSMA: We knew some of it



S & B Ranch

Location: Arbuckle, CA
Acres in cultivation: 5-10
Employees: 2

Markets: online, farm stand, small amount of wholesale
Crop(s): Almonds
Before the CAFF Partner Farm Program did you know what you needed to do to be in compliance with FSMA: No



Wild Dog Farm

Location: Oakland, CA
Acres in cultivation: less than 1
Employees: 1

Markets: local restaurants
Crop(s): Microgreens
Before the CAFF Partner Farm Program did you know what you needed to do to be in compliance with FSMA: No



Agua Dulce Farm

Location: San Diego, CA
Acres in cultivation: less than 1
Employees: 4

Markets: CSA
Crop(s): Mixed vegetables
Before the CAFF Partner Farm Program did you know what you needed to do to be in compliance with FSMA: No



Project Details

CAFF Food Safety staff met with farmers in the Partner Farm program and visited their farms to learn more about the farmer's food safety goals. Then CAFF and the farmer worked together to create a food safety action plan that included small steps the farmer would take over some period of time (2-12 months) to achieve the end food safety goal(s). Most farmers had a number of good food safety practices in place already and it was often an issue that they were not keeping track of a record that they needed to be. Farmers mentioned that they found it helpful for someone with "outside" eyes to review their food safety program and practices with them because it helped reveal areas where they could improve. After completing the program the farmers were asked if they felt more confident in approaching buyers and explaining their farm's food safety program. 100% of farmers in the program said that they felt more confident about how to respond in that situation. Below are some thoughts the farmers shared on changes they made to different parts of their food safety plans and practices.

Water:

- The farms that had not already started, began testing production and postharvest water
- One farm added a water section to their food safety plan

Worker Health & Hygiene:

- Provided training to staff and implemented monthly/quarterly/new hire re-training
- Started keeping paper records of each training, topics covered, and who was in attendance
- Updated staff on what to do in the event they are injured
- Incorporated the use of online training videos for workers



First aid and handwashing signs posted at one farm



Various examples of postharvest and equipment storage best practices

Equipment, Tools, and Buildings

- Created a cleaning schedule for key equipment that's used frequently
- Created a sanitizing schedule for key equipment that's used frequently
- Labeled equipment for harvest/postharvest vs. other farm activities
- Created storage locations for tools and equipment
- Implemented a pest control plan
- Labeled tool storage, first aid, hand wash area, daily sanitizing schedule

Postharvest

- Implemented a before and after sanitization practice for harvest equipment
- Created a cooler cleaning schedule and changed out packing table to metal instead of wood
- Trained workers on sanitizing surfaces, tools, and use clean water for postharvest washing
- Trained employees on not harvesting any crop with animal feces on it
- Started storing product up off the ground in the cooler
- Trained employees about refilling dunk tanks frequently

Summary Info

Farmer Feedback

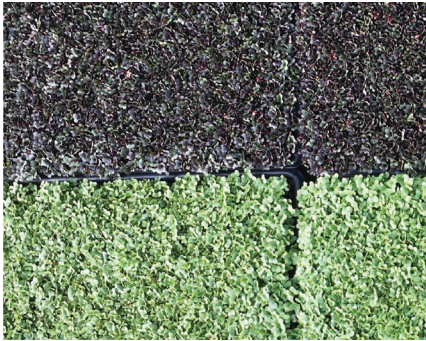
All of the farmers that participated in the program this round agreed that the easiest area of the farm to make on-farm food safety improvements is with employee health and hygiene practices. Some important health and hygiene practices to train employees on include:

- Importance of handwashing: when, where, and how to do it correctly
- What to do if they get injured
- Importance of proper sanitation practices (bathroom, clothing)
- Importance of not coming to work when sick and different sick symptoms to be aware of
- Correct areas of the farm where eating and smoking are allowed
- Correct glove practices, if gloves are used on farm
- Correct harvest and postharvest practices

You can learn more about these topics and access free, printable employee training guides at: <https://www.caff.org/food-safety/food-safety-plan-templates/>.



Harvesting potatoes - employee practices are key to reducing food safety risks on the farm



Advice from the Farmers to Other Farmers:

“There’s a lot of learn. Take it one step at a time. Don’t get overwhelmed.”

“Make sure to reach out to CAFF for more info and the latest requirements.”

“Talk to CAFF for assistance. We feel like we need someone to be there to answer questions and help explain things that we may not understand. It was so essential to be able to have help in doing this. We feel that we have a better understanding, and even if we have more that can be done, we feel that we are headed in the right direction.”

“The good news is that most likely you already have some “common sense” practices in place for food safety. In developing an FSP, you will take those practices and expand/strengthen them to reach compliance. Once you start implementing good food safety practices, they will become routinized and won’t seem like such a chore. Plus you will be able to rest easy knowing that you have covered all your bases, reducing the likelihood that your product will result in anyone getting sick.”

Learn more about on-farm Food Safety best practices at caff.org/thefarmersbeet and listen to our podcast episodes on different on-farm food safety best practices.



Acknowledgments

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