

NC On-Farm Readiness Review Program:

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law in 2011 to improve the safety of all foods regulated by the FDA, including fruits and vegetables. FSMA establishes a “farm to fork” approach of ensuring the safety of our food supply with a focus on preventing food safety issues.

In 2015, FDA issued the Produce Safety Rule which details science-based minimum standards for the growing, harvesting, packing and holding of fruits and vegetables. Farms that produce fresh fruits and vegetables commonly consumed raw may be subject to the PSR. Farm eligibility to the PSR is detailed and includes several size and activity based exemptions and exclusions that farmers need to understand before inspections begin in early 2019.

Under the leadership of Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler, the department worked with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture to establish the Produce Safety Consortium. This group of state and federal partners was tasked with establishing produce safety programs, resulting in the development of the On-Farm Readiness Review to assist farmers with FSMA and PSR compliance. Troxler recognized early on that the farming community would need assistance in order to be successful in implementing these new and far-reaching food safety standards.

An OFRR is an anonymous, voluntary, non-regulatory visit conducted by produce safety professionals at the invitation of the farmer. The goal of the OFRR is to help farmers determine if they are exempt from the Produce Safety Rule, assess current farm readiness for PSR compliance and provide farmers with information to help them in their preparations to meet the requirements of the PSR.

An OFRR is not an audit, nor is it a pre-inspection – the farm is provided with resources and information to assist their food safety efforts. NCDA&CS, in collaboration with N.C. State University Cooperative Extension, is signing growers up for On-Farm Readiness Reviews (OFRR) for fruit and vegetable farms potentially impacted by the PSR.

“I strongly encourage all fresh fruit and vegetable farmers to take advantage of the on-farm readiness review,” Troxler said. “The Produce Safety Rule requirements are complicated and the review is a great way to get one-on-one technical assistance to better understand these requirements.”

Prior to participating in an OFRR, farmers must attend the Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course, or an equivalent training course, to become familiar with the PSR rule. These training courses satisfy the training requirement outlined in the PSR. NCSU area specialized agents for food safety hold regularly scheduled training courses. For more information, visit <https://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/2017/02/fsma-produce-safety-rule-growers-training/>

Farmers interested in participating in an OFRR should contact the NCDA&CS Produce Safety Office at 919-614 3082 or email Chris Harris, produce program manager, at chris.harris@ncagr.gov.