Training Underserved Producers on Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) for Food Safety: Are We There Yet?

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Abstract
A training model that enhanced risk management skills, and increased profitability for disadvantaged blueberry growers and farmworkers was developed (Gómez-Rodas et al. 2005). The training consisted of modules with lectures and notes and Experiential Learning (hands-on field training). In 2005, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) for food safety was added to the training. Following the diffusion model for technology transfer two, one-hour slide show lectures were developed; a general introduction to food safety and a blueberry food safety from planting to packing. However, no notes were provided and no Experiential Learning was offered. Because diffusion only creates awareness for technology implementation, it must be followed by a face-to-face training of end-users (Baskerville and Pries-Heje. 2003, Kremic 2003). Successful implementation of GAPs for food safety was evaluated by visual inspection of 5 blueberry producing, packing and shipping companies whose workers and growers had participated in our training program. At harvest, evaluated existence of clean port –a- potties, hand-washing stations, available drinking water and clean lugs was evaluated. At packing, compliance with dress codes (hair and beard nets, disposable gloves, face masks) for employees handling fruit. Partial success in contrast with the overall success of the blueberry IPM Scout Training program was achieved. At harvest, all enterprises provided clean restrooms and hand washing stations. But, only three provided clean lugs for fruit handling. None enforced hand washing after using restrooms. During packing, only one facility complied with all food safety requirements. This poster addressed challenges in implementing a food safety component into a successful technology transfer program, and how to facilitate food safety technologies adoption by underserved producers using the experience gained in our blueberry IPM Scout Training program. Results indicated that detailed notes for review and Experiential Learning are not incorporated, the likelihood of success is greatly diminished. Therefore, in food safety we are not there yet!

Keywords: technology transfer, GAPs, food safety, underserved producers