

VCFSA NEWS



Ventura County Food Safety Association

www.vcfsa.org

June 2021

Ventura County on Track to Enter Yellow Tier

County officials announced that Ventura County has dropped to just 13 new COVID cases a day. This is low enough to qualify for the yellow tier. Click [here](#) to see details and what the yellow tier allows.

GLOBALG.A.P. Gains GFSI Recognition for Produce Handling Assurance

The Global Food Safety Initiative and GLOBALG.A.P. are pleased to announce that GLOBALG.A.P. has successfully achieved recognition against GFSI's Benchmarking Requirements Version 2020.1. The recognition encompasses Produce Handling Assurance (PHA) certification program.

The PHA certification program is available to on-farm and stand-alone post-harvest handling facilities around the world. It provides food safety management certification of post-harvest activities, such as cooling, packing, re-packing, handling, and storage of crops for consumption. The PHA certification program incorporates United States Food Safety Modernization Act requirements from both the Produce Safety Rule and the Preventive Controls for Human Food Rule, where applicable.

"PHA allows GLOBALG.A.P. to extend exceptional food safety assurance to both field and facility" said Kristian Moeller, Managing Director at GLOBALG.A.P. "We are pleased to now offer PHA as a GFSI benchmarked standard, alongside the Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) and Harmonized Produce Safety Standard (HPSS) certification programs for farms."

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Food Safety and Local News

- New Listeria [species](#) have been discovered. What does this mean for your EMP?
- Utilize available [Food Safety Assessment Tools](#) from USDA FSIS.
- There are now 9 major food allergens in the United States. See the new addition [here](#).
- Read about the [CDC's](#) role in Food Safety.
- The produce industry may be seeing pallet shortages. [United Fresh](#) breaks it down.
- FDA launches a challenge to achieve its [tech-enabled traceability](#) element.
- To wear or not to wear a mask in California. [CDPH](#) guidance discusses.
- Get involved in Ventura County Food Safety Association. [Contact](#) us to see how.

Food Safety Has No Competition

Produce Safety Pros Dwindle as Demands Increase

QA Magazine.com March April 2021

For as much as I try to encourage budding food safety professionals to apply their talent to the produce industry, there is that gnawing thought in the back of my mind that wonders what sane person would work with a commodity that lacks a kill step and seems at the top of outbreak investigators' "suspect" lists.

Recently I received the following note from a United Fresh Produce Association member, which I've copied with the (anonymous) author's permission. It speaks to the stress that produce safety professionals feel.

The ability to detect outbreaks related to produce is far outpacing the research and technology to prevent them. This feeling of helplessness and the inability to provide buyers and regulators with a "good enough" answer may be pushing produce safety professionals toward other industries, further exacerbating the issue.

I think we need to continue the conversation about food safety culture. Buyers seem to think that culture is auditable, and a company's culture, food safety or otherwise, is not the sole responsibility of the food safety department. Food safety is becoming a catch-all for things buyers want to regulate. This is entirely unfair to those of us who head the department. We cannot be experts in all things, but that is becoming the expectation as buyers are seeking more information on social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and now COVID-19 care and practices (as examples) — none of which are solely (if at all) handled in a food safety department.

"Super metrics" — all the things buyers require above and beyond third-party audit schemes — is becoming a huge issue, especially for product testing. Different buyers are asking for different testing procedures that can put us at conflict with another buyer's requirements, and no buyer cares about the predicament that puts us in. Additionally, these buyers are not willing to pay us more for the added expenses we acquire to implement their additional practices. The attitude is: "That's just the cost of doing business with us."

This creates an us versus them mentality, not a cooperative relationship.

Ground-level food safety is a very difficult job. We never do anything good enough for anyone, and we are constantly being reminded of that based on the amount of audits we undergo and the additional requirements set upon us. After time, this takes a toll on you as a person, affecting your personal health and wellbeing. I know seven people who have left ground-level food safety positions in the last three years. We need experienced people in this position. But experienced people get too burned out because they care. The amount of personal responsibility that falls on the head of a food safety person is extremely burdensome. We get held accountable for everything we know, and everything we do not know.

"Food safety" has stretched so far beyond mitigating physical, chemical and biological risks to our food. I think we need to refocus our efforts. At least start the conversation about what is within the ability of a food safety department to realistically manage and realistically control.

In real culture training, we talk about the underlying truths that drive people's behaviors. I think we need to start having these hard conversations to find some common ground between buyers and growers. The more outbreaks we have, the harder buyers come down on us. The harder buyers come down on us, the more we resent them as we are getting held responsible for outbreaks when no one has the answer to their cause. This is not a viable way to continue operating. As technology of detection advances, it's only going to get harder for us to prevent. Buyers need to consider the challenges growers face operationally, not just in food safety. But that doesn't mean they should be auditing growers and be so in their businesses either.

Just some things that have been weighing on my mind. I really think we need to look beyond science and regulation. Look at all of the additional regulations based on science we put forth in leafy greens that still isn't preventing outbreaks from happening. You know what the definition of insanity is, right?

And so, as an association professional, I'm left wondering how I can help people find common ground and work collaboratively toward solutions. For the sake of produce safety, we can't have an environment where produce safety professionals get so discouraged that they leave the field.

Written by Dr Jennifer McEntire—VP of Food Safety, United Fresh Produce Association