



For Immediate Release

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USDA NASS Begins Gathering Food Safety Data About Fruit and Vegetable Operations Nationwide

WASHINGTON, Sept. XX, 2015 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is now surveying produce packers and other post-harvest businesses to help fruit and vegetables operations as they prepare to implement new federal food safety requirements.

The 2015 Produce Post-Harvest Microbial Food Safety Practices Survey marks the first time since 1998 that such a survey has been conducted. NASS Administrator Joseph T. Reilly encouraged operators to participate in the survey, noting that implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) (website) might affect post-harvest businesses.

FSMA was signed into law in 2011. It aims to ensure the U.S. food supply is safe by shifting the focus from responding to contamination to preventing it, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Under FSMA, the FDA may issue rules for produce safety.

“Better data lead to better decisions,” Reilly said. “This survey will provide a wealth of new information with respect to where the industry is on the eve of FSMA implementation.”

The survey looks at food safety practices, some costs, information about the sizes and types of operations, and any food safety requirements for produce coming into the post-harvest operation. NASS will contact approximately 2,200 post-harvest businesses across the United States. Businesses may respond online at [www.agcounts.usda.gov \(website\)](http://www.agcounts.usda.gov) through January 2016. Although USDA recommends responding online as the most convenient method, businesses also have the option to respond by mail.

Data obtained from the survey will be used by USDA’s Economic Research Service (ERS), the sponsoring agency for the project, for analysis and publication. ERS will use the data to:

- Document changes in food safety practices since 1998
- Provide a benchmark of practices prior to implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)
- Examine expected costs of compliance
- Estimate the impact of FSMA on the produce industry
- Identify the most crucial areas for future research and training efforts

- Ensure that policymakers, produce associations, and produce businesses have up-to-date information to make informed decisions that could impact the produce industry

There will be two other related surveys that focus on produce growers. Both the 2015 Fruit Chemical Use and 2016 Vegetable Chemical Use Surveys will also contain sections on microbial food safety and these will be sent to 10,900 growers in total.

NASS conducts the surveys for ERS under an interagency agreement. NASS and ERS safeguard the privacy of all respondents. Responses are kept confidential and results will only be published in aggregate, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified, as required by Federal law.

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NASS is the federal statistical agency responsible for producing official data about U.S. agriculture and is committed to providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. We invite you to provide feedback on our products and services. Sign up at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/subscriptions> and look for “NASS Data User Community.”

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