

**CFSC/NESFP/NOFA – RMA Food Safety Learning Community**  
**Conference Call #1 – Follow up Rhode Island GAPs Presentation**  
**February 16, 2012; 11-12pm**  
**Facilitator: Kristen Markley, Community Food Security Coalition**  
**Note-taker: Jennifer Hashley, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project**

**Introductions / Participants:** (Name, Org, Location, Role and Audience related to Institutional Markets)

- **Kristen Markley, CFSC** – central PA – resource person and organize conference, workshops, technical assistance, run learning communities related to food safety/liability for institutional markets, and farm-to-institutional; audience: varied
- **Jennifer Hashley, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project** (Tufts/CTI)
- **Cheryl Wixon, MOFGA** – Ag Engineer, Food Safety Specialist & Market – expand markets for farmers primarily in hospitals, value-added producers, and institutional, small diversified farms, larger farms, local farm-to-school movement.
- **Lynn Blevins, UVM Extension** – Center for Sust Ag (epidemiologist), education of small diversified farms (not GAPs but want food safety plan to sell to institutions), looking at program for folks not going into GAPs but more practical minded.
- **Ginger Nickerson, UVM Ext** (Ctr Sust Ag) – both large and small diversified farms, both GAPs audit and just interested in learning general food safety practices. Colleague Hans Estrin (Institutional Markets) – working with Health Care without Harm. Wants to expand outreach to New Americans, ESL, and Women, Beginning Farmers.
- **Andy Pressman, NCAT**, Sust Ag Specialist – promote technical assistance with crop production and marketing.
- **Kimberley Clark – Farm to School Coordinator in RI** (Kids First, Real Food First, FINE), audience varied: schools, institutions, farmers and folks in community who encourage/advocate local foods
- **Dave Marvel, DE – Vegetable Growers Assoc. of DE**, both large/small growers. GAPs/Food Safety and Farm-to-School program.
- **Mary Staack, RMA in Raleigh, NC** – RMA is fund Risk Management projects in Northeast; resource for crop insurance information.
- **Kathy Gaskin, ED Healthy Adams County, PA** (Gettysburg) – first Food Policy Council in PA – chaired Farm to Institution Committee, works with food service directors, distributors, local hospital, getting local food into hospital, works with Penn State Extension and individuals with interest in F2I.
- **Peter Allison, FINE (Hartland, VT)**, Farm to Institution Collaborative (New England) – coordinates people who work with farmers, related to insurance/liability for all types of institutions in NE.
- **Susan Beal, PASA, Ag Science Advisor** – work varies (1-1 coaching/consulting), group trainings, agencies/institutions, clarity/advocacy, helping translate regulatory language into practical/functional at farm gate level.
- **Simca Horwitz, Mass Farm-to-School Project** – work with school food service staff and management companies and farmers – looking at food safety requirements and whether alternatives exist.

**Background on Project:** CFSC working with New Entry and MOFGA on a RMA-funded Food Safety and Insurance for Sales to Institutions to formulate a Northeast Regional Learning Community. Major activities of the learning community include 4 webinars (February – October) with 4 follow up

conference calls, also includes web page, case studies, other resources identified, and discussion on Google Group (listserv). Purpose of learning community is also to brainstorm, share ideas, share resources, and learn from each other. Participants are encouraged to use discussion group to post questions, share resources, or other items of interest to food safety, liability insurance, or other related topics. A survey was circulated to solicit topics participants were interested in, top votes were:

Rhode Island GAPs and examples of institutional purchasing that helps limited resource producers (for April).

### **Discussion Questions:**

#### ***What did you gain from participating in the webinar on the RI GAP program?***

(Jennifer Hashley) Helpful to hear the practical skills aspect of RI's experience working directly with farmers in the field (no surprises, complimenting farmers on good practices, establishing trust, etc.); would be helpful to hear other educators experience in working with farmers in field.

#### ***Is there anything similar (or different) that you are doing that you can share with the group?***

(Ginger Nickerson) Vermont had significant interest in "GAPs-Lite" – most larger farmers asked to be going through USDA Approved GAPs Audit (or Red Tomato or Apple Growers Audit) who are selling to supermarkets – but smaller farmers who are selling to schools/hospitals but at smaller scale, interested in some kind of food safety training. Mini-grant, small county pilot project with Wyndham County Farm/Food Project who is aggregating products, distributed to schools, hospitals, senior centers. Looked at Iowa, RI, MOFGA, Mass CQP food safety programs as examples. Vermont Veg and Berry Growers Assoc. deciding whether VT Agency of Ag should develop program (regulate dairy/livestock, but not fresh produce) to regulate them – will they create Vermont Audit/Checklist Program (similar to RI GAPs). Waiting to see what happens with FSMA so new program won't be in conflict or fall through cracks.

(Ginger) Has anyone used **FamilyFarmed.org online food safety tool**? Folks are looking at it to evaluate it over coming weeks/months. (Mary Staak) Have been working with group to develop new tool, rolled out in Mid-Dec 2011, doing promotions for website – would be good to have folks take a look at see if orgs and farmers could use; designed to be user-friendly.

#### ***What doesn't work for your situation (in regards to the RI GAP program)?*** N/A

#### ***Do you work closely with farmers on food safety issues or know of others who do?***

(Lynn Blevins, VT) – Manure issue posed in the Q/A session, seemed black and white. Manure is great source of fertility, especially in diversified livestock/mixed cropping systems. (Cheryl, MOFGA) – Integrate National Organic Program standards into their food safety programs; ie, 120 days direct contact; 90 days not in direct contact. (Kim, Kids First, RI) – similar guidelines for school gardens for crops grown in meal programs; similar issues with fear of manure (B/W) guidelines. (Ginger, UVM) – USDA GAPs standard is 120 days for raw manure, but does not make distinction between crops that come into direct contact with soil. Extensive research on manure practices and pathogens in research.

(David Marvel, DE) – only thing selling for fresh market is watermelon (fairly easy to comply). Hired a new person to help farmers write food safety plans. Apples, sweet corn and watermelon are the primary crops interested in selling to schools. Most farms are mid-sized to large veggie/fruit growers (50-1,000+ acres) who may need GIP-GAP certification. Mostly follow Cornell University's Food Safety plans. Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association of DE is lobbying to get state funding to get a state-funded GAP certifier to provide services to growers (vs. hiring independent company). Many farms have large roadside stands to address beach markets. Most vegetables are for processing (3/4) vs fresh market (1/4). Looking at processing side, what they can enhance with relation to food safety.

### ***Strategies you have experienced or come across for working closely with farmers and building trust/ relationships?***

(Susan Beal, PASA) talking with farmers to make rules/regs approachable (intimidated), getting issues down to practical level, doing work as representative of **Food Alliance** (not food safety certification), but criteria helps them look at and do farm planning to reduce risk, id trap doors. Using it with new/beginning farmers for how to plan farm setup, triage priorities, good environmental effects/measuring what is going on ecological feedback. Great model for planning and assessment. Translating what regulations “really mean” at FM or other sales venue, how to build infrastructure for farm, transport or at sales venue. Will post resources and send links to Food Alliance farmers. (Ginger N) – doesn't address microbial issues, have you developed other resources for this? (Susan) – Augment with needs of individual farmer depending on enterprise and markets. In PA also has varying FM legislation and have their own food safety issues, so they quilt together resources into meaningful training.

(Mary, RMA) – Shared WV approach to working with farmers: moved toward meeting farmers where they are at and working in more collaborative approach versus imposing regulations. Tried to sell increased financial gain by accessing new markets.

### ***Other Questions?***

(Simca, MA F2S) – what is role of food service management companies in requiring insurance/food safety certification? Seeing in MA that buyers want to source local product with those requirements, but are buying it anyway to source it locally even if they don't have certifications because of issues with supply. If lax, this doesn't encourage folks to recertify. Once produce is at distributor, is assumption that produce bought from distributor is GAP certified? (Kim, RI)- Chartwell's has been very (100%) firm in requiring GAP certification. Has influenced 3 growers to get GAP certified and haven't heard it being too overwhelming to get recertified. Two others (Aramark and Sodexo) also require GAPs certification; but may not be a mechanism to verify similar to Chartwell's. RI will help connect growers to purchasers. There are some farms who sell into food service/food service programs but is more of an oversight versus allowance, which when addressed, it does motivate growers to get certified. School Food Service director also is aware of who is GAP certified so can direct distributors to purchase from XX farm who is certified.

### ***Other related resources/ programs the group may be interested in?***

Food Alliance; Family-Farmed.org Food Safety Online Tool

### **Next Steps:**

Send helpful resources to Google Discussion Group. Keep conversation going there!

Next webinar will be in April on **Institutional Food Service Management Companies** that help limited resource producers address food safety and liability insurance issues. Kristen is in conversations with Sodexo who is working to help make food safety/insurance requirements more farmer-friendly.