

# Profile from the Field

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## Peer-to-Peer Food Safety Education Fruitful for Hmong-American Farmers in Minnesota

**Project Title:** Building Capacity via Peer-to-Peer Food Safety Education with Hmong-American Fruit and Vegetable Farmers

**Coordinator:** Annalisa Hultberg

**Location:** Minnesota

**SARE Grant:** \$29,897

**Duration:** 2016-2017

**To read the full project report, go to**  
<https://projects.sare.org/search-projects/>  
**and search for project number ONC16-016**



*Handwashing, vegetable washing, and cleaning and sanitizing routines were the key concepts that were covered through a peer-to-peer food safety SARE project with Hmong-American fruit and vegetable producers in Minnesota. Photo courtesy of Annalisa Hultberg.*

When the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law in 2015, it included new provisions that regulate food safety requirements for some fruit and vegetable farms. This new federal food safety legislation, along with market-based audit programs like Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), can seem daunting to smallscale or diversified farmers. As a statewide Extension Educator for farm food safety at the University of Minnesota, Annalisa Hultberg says her program's goal is to help fruit and vegetable growers understand

the science-based best practices to reduce potential risks on the farm.

“While many farmers sell vegetables at farmers’ markets, these markets are becoming more saturated, and many farmers seek to enter new wholesale markets,” said Hultberg. “These wholesale markets often require food safety training, audits, or a written food safety plan. We help farmers understand how Good Agricultural Practices can improve the safety of their fresh produce and help them enter these new markets. You can never eliminate all the risks, but doing basic things like washing hands, cleaning surfaces, and getting water tested goes a long way in reducing potential risk.”

Hultberg has been working with the Hmong-American farming community in Minnesota for more than ten years. She recognized that some of these concepts or requirements were new to some of the Hmong-American farmers she works with; she learned from the farmers that a peer-to-peer educational model could be an effective way to share this information. Hultberg received a \$29,897 NCR-SARE Partnership grant to work with a small group of Hmong-American farmers to provide in-depth education around farm food safety principals, help them implement these evidence-based food safety practices on their farm, and provide a platform to share these ideas with their peers.

An advisory board of Hmong-American farmers led the activities, planning, and deliverables of the project, and it was evident early on that the farmers wanted to lead the trainings themselves.

“Building capacity among a few farmers, so that they can share that information with their friends, is a good practice and well-suited for this community,” said Hultberg. “The farmers were empowered and happy to participate, and were very proud to teach these concepts to their fellow farmers.”

Two nonprofit partner organizations, the Hmong American Partnership (HAP) and The Good Acre, helped recruit farmers to participate in the workshops and helped ensure that the content met the needs of the growers. HAP’s agriculture program associate, Tria Vue, works directly with farmers and builds relations between them and local and regional markets; HAP offers educational training program on a variety of topics, and this project became one of the training opportunities they offered. Meanwhile, The Good Acre, a nonprofit food hub that buys directly from many immigrant farmers for wholesale and CSA, had some funds available to build hand washing stations, which meant they could provide workshop participants with the materials they needed to build hand washing stations, as well as a food buyer’s perspective.

During the first year of the project, project “farmer leaders” received compensation to attend field days, conferences, and workshops across Minnesota to enhance their farming skills, knowledge, and leadership capacity as peer-to-peer educators. Meanwhile, the project team hosted two field days and two winter workshops, which showcased the construction and use of safe hand washing stations and safe vegetable washing stands, water quality and testing, and animal exclusion and fencing options. During the second year of the grant, the Hmong-American farmer leaders who had been trained during the first year took on more responsibility. Ten field

days, two conference presentations, and the development of food safety videos in the Hmong language helped the farmer leaders build their confidence and knowledge to share with other farmers.

“I have two hand washing stands on my farm that they helped me learn to build, and my family uses them before we pick the vegetables,” said one workshop participant. “I don’t want to make someone sick. This makes my produce safer and cleaner.”

By the end of the project, the team had helped one producer develop a food safety plan. That farmer won a contract with Minneapolis Public Schools, and was able to deliver a large quantity of produce in fewer deliveries, which was a goal for his farm. He has continued this contract, each year increasing the amount of produce sold to the school district.

“This project gave him the skills and knowledge necessary to meet demands of growing for Minneapolis Public Schools,” said Hultberg. “He’s also getting organically certified, so having both of those certifications is a great place for him to be from a marketing standpoint.”

For more information, visit the SARE project reporting website at <https://projects.sare.org/search-projects/> and search for project number ONC16-016, or contact the NCR-SARE office. You can view the food safety videos from this project online at [www.youtube.com/channel/UCAkZq\\_Q\\_zWKpaa-ibo4akFQ/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAkZq_Q_zWKpaa-ibo4akFQ/videos).

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