



MISSISSIPPI

Food Defense, Biosecurity and Traceability at the Farm Level as Essential Elements to Risk Management for Mississippi Producers and Processors

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Project Introduction

Expended Amount: \$33,411

This project provided lecture-based and hands-on education to food producers of Mississippi and the surrounding region. The project's focus was to give producers and processors the information and tools to develop a food defense plan for their operation to reduce risks of intentional and unintentional contamination. Reducing economic losses from natural disasters and/or other incidents that may cause product recalls and decreased consumer confidence in agricultural products was discussed. Participants completed a model plan template and risk assessment questionnaire for their operation/enterprise. The risk assessment addressed the following areas of food defense: transportation, inside and outside security, personnel, product protection, disaster plans, product traceability and succession of operations/ownership.

Project Participants

Project participants were from diverse areas of operations including production/farming, processing, transportation, distribution, regulatory, packaging and extension/academia. Responsibilities included farm owners, plant owners, production and quality assurance managers, HACCP coordinators, research/students, food inspectors, training coordinator, Extension personnel, 4-H leaders, executive secretary and operations management. Participants understood the importance of food defense, biosecurity and traceability for their business, food commodity and their customers and consumers. USDA has proposed that 90% of inspected plants have voluntary food defense

plans operational by 2015. FDA under the FSMA of 2012 requires most operations to have some means of food defense. In addition, all federal food programs require those that want to bid on food contracts to have a food defense plan in order to be considered for the food commodity bid.

Project Area

The focus area of this project was Mississippi. Workshops were strategically planned in Mississippi locations – Verona, Hattiesburg, Brookhaven, Grenada and two in Brandon – to reach more participants and cover the food commodities found statewide. Invitation was also extended outside the boundaries of Mississippi, which garnered several participants from Tennessee and Alabama.

Project Outcomes

Through this project, participants became more aware of the importance and principles of food defense, biosecurity and traceability for the longevity of their business, safety of their food and overall good practices. Over the course of the six workshops, 75% of participants showed increased knowledge of these principles as measured through pre- and post-tests. Out of 36 participants who responded to workshop follow-ups, 14 have made changes to how they conduct business and 19 have a food defense plan with 12 planning to make changes to their operations and/or food defense plan as a result of the training received. Twenty-three respondents have a traceability plan, and 24 respondents shared information learned at the workshop with other workers/employees. When asked how many people could potentially benefit from their attendance of the workshop, 15 respondents indicated over 500 people each could benefit.

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■ Quotes

“Very beneficial and informative workshop.”
“Food defense is good to be aware of and brought to our attention.” – From an extension agent.
“Good program. Loved the worksheets and examples in the notebook.”
“Very helpful.” Specific example: started securing doors with a lock on fruit stand.
“Changing my food defense plan after workshop.”
“Taught me a lot and made me more aware.”
“Very in-depth. The workshop was definitely worth the time.”
“Very good program and great for small companies to see government expectations.”
“Great information and well done with delivering methods. Excellent educators!”
“This training was very useful and contained important information.”
“Excellent information, well organized, handouts are a good manual to develop a written plan.”
“Great materials – lot more details than other classes attended.”
“Information was very informative. Program was very well organized and informing.”
“Looked more closely at where the food comes from and making sure it is clean.”
“More in-depth, different ways to think about things.”
“Thank you for encouraging me to attend the Food Security and Defense meeting conducted by MSU Extension Service today. I learned a great deal about the considerations that must be addressed within our food supply chain. Dr. Williams and Dr. Hood did a great job explaining the issues surrounding our industry’s security concerns and a future action plan to strengthen our food supply safety. I welcome any questions of my perspective regarding today’s meeting. I highly recommend MPA members that were not able to attend to consider future attendance.” – Dale Wiggins, Manager of Food Industry Division, The Way, Inc.®

■ Project Success Story

One individual, large-scale vegetable producer near Philadelphia, MS, immediately took the food defense plan model from the workshop and expanded it dramatically to incorporate the food defense plan portion into a standard operating procedure manual for his operation with great detail of all processes, procedures and employee duties. He was asked to present his overview of his project and the steps to a local horticulture production area meeting a few months after his plan was completed and put into effect.

A few other actions noted on 6-month follow-up calls included the following: (Names and locations not provided/unavailable)

“Put up perimeter fence around orchard.”

“Put locks on the kitchen and purchased two cameras.”

“Raised awareness and made me more alert as to what goes on around the operation.”

***Sandra Martini, H. L. Goodwin** and **Ronald L. Rainey**, Grant Coordinator and Co-Directors, respectively, of the Southern Risk Management Education Center, serve as editors of this report series. To learn more about risk management education programs and resources, visit the Southern Center web site (<http://srmec.uark.edu>) or the Extension Risk Management Education Program link (www.extensionrme.org).

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