

What to Expect: Produce Safety Farm Inspections

This document provides an overview of how to prepare for and what to expect during a produce safety farm inspection. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (the Agency) conducts routine inspections of produce farms subject to the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (21 CFR § 112) as part of its mission to ensure food safety. The Agency is committed to an educational approach and works closely with growers and Extension partners to share resources on produce safety best practices and ways to achieve compliance with the Produce Safety Rule.

Not sure whether your farm requires an inspection? Contact the Produce Team at agr.fsma@vermont.gov or call (802) 828-2433.

Prepare for Inspection

Follow these steps to help you prepare:

- Step 1 – Attend a Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training.** This training covers all the requirements of the Produce Safety Rule and is required for farms covered by the Rule. Trainings are hosted in Vermont periodically. Find a training on the Produce Safety Alliance website: producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/training/grower-training-courses/.
- Step 2 – Schedule an “On-Farm Readiness Review”** to find out what your farm is doing well and where you can make improvements. A Review is an educational assessment of a farm’s readiness to meet the Rule requirements. The review team provides feedback tailored to your farm. Learn more at agriculture.vermont.gov/produceprogram/OFRR. Email agr.fsma@vermont.gov to schedule a visit.
- Step 3 – Review your On-Farm Readiness Review notes, evaluate how things went, and make improvements before your initial inspection.** Review factsheets and guidance documents available on our website: agriculture.vermont.gov/produceprogram/. Reach out to the Produce Team with any questions.

Scheduling an Inspection

Most inspections are scheduled in advance and take place during the farm’s primary growing season. Farms can expect a call from the inspector 1-2 weeks in advance to schedule the day and time for the inspection. Most inspections take place between early morning to mid-afternoon so the inspector can observe harvesting, packing, and other regular farm activities.

On the Day of the Inspection

The inspector will introduce themselves as an employee of the Agency and ask to meet with the farm owner or person in charge of produce safety. Ideally this person should be available for the duration of the inspection. The inspection will consist of an initial meeting, a walk-through assessment of the farm, and an exit meeting.

The inspector will ask questions while they assess a range of farm activities related to growing, harvesting, packing, and holding (e.g. storing) of produce that is subject to the Rule. The inspector will ask to assess:

- Growing areas;
- Harvesting, washing and packing activities;
- Equipment, tools, and buildings used for covered activities;
- Toilet and handwashing facilities;
- Water sources and irrigation systems;
- Manure and composting sites;
- Wildlife and pest control management;
- Farm records
- And other topics that are covered under the Rule.

The inspector will work with you to coordinate times to observe specific activities. The inspector will take notes and may take pictures. Throughout the walk-through the inspector will explain what is being looked at and why.

During the exit meeting, the inspector will discuss any notable findings with the person in charge. The inspector can provide educational resources, such as guidance documents, to assist the farm with achieving compliance. If an issue cannot be corrected during the inspection, the inspector will establish a timeframe for implementing corrective actions, which may involve a follow-up inspection.

During the exit interview the inspector will provide you with a copy of the inspection form that lists the notable findings. Don't hesitate to ask questions at any point during or after the inspection.

Questions?

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