



Qualified Exempt Farms in Minnesota

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Minnesota Produce Safety Program Basics

- Current Program Structure
 - 1 Program Manager/PI
 - 2 Inspectors
- No license or registration required
 - Statutory exemption

Produce Safety Rule (PSR) Status Categories	2025 Calendar Year
Covered	51 (4%)
Eligible for an Exemption - Qualified Exempt	205 (15%)
Commercial Processing Exemption	62 (5%)
Micro Exempt	889 (65%)
Excluded – Other	167 (12%)
Total Produce Farms in Inventory	1,374

Minnesota Local Foods Systems

- Geographically large and dispersed, short growing season
- Most produce is sold at farmers markets & market stands
 - Over 375 farmers markets statewide
 - Low/no barrier to sell
- Growing interest to sell to local grocery stores, food hubs and schools (higher barrier to entry)
- Very few farms selling to distributors (high barrier)
- Small # of covered farms, but higher # of QE farms and Micro exempt farms
 - Less funding, stretches resources

How Minnesota Ranks Compared to Other States	
Covered	#31
Qualified Exempt	#9
Micro Exempt	#6
Rarely Consumed Raw	#12
Processing Exempt	#8
Enforcement Discretion	#7

Managing Produce Inventory Historically...



- Annual Grower Questionnaire (survey) – emailed or mailed
 - A farm status under the PSR would ‘expire’ every year
 - Most accurate data possible
- Challenges
 - Declining response rates over time
 - Perception of survey fatigue among growers
 - Growers preferred to *only report changes*, rather than complete a full survey annually
 - After first CAP cycle, significant funding cuts and reduced staffing capacity

New(ish) Farm Inventory Process

- Grower Questionnaire (survey)
 - Sent every 3 years now (based on last verified year)
 - Pre-populated form (known/existing farms)
 - Delivered via email & mail
 - 39% and 19% response rate, respectively
- Nonresponse Follow-Up (Escalation Process)
 - Phone calls to farms
 - Online research
 - Certified letters
 - Farm visits, if needed



2025 FSMA Produce Safety Grower Questionnaire - Pre-populated

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) identified you as a produce farm from public data sources and you haven't responded to our request for confirmation through our Grower Questionnaire in the past or recently. This periodic questionnaire helps determine how the federal Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR) applies to your operation for the 2025 growing season.

If you are not a produce farm or are no longer in business, your response will help us update our contact list and avoid future follow-ups. Failure to complete the questionnaire may result in phone calls or an in-person farm visit to determine your farm's PSR status. We know farmers are very busy and provide this questionnaire to be efficient and less intrusive.

Benefits to produce farmers completing this questionnaire include:

- Funding opportunities such as the Produce Safety Mini-Grant
- The latest updates and resources about trainings and on-farm produce safety information
- Knowledgeable resources for specific farm questions both at the MDA and University of Minnesota Extension

After completing the questionnaire, you will receive official notification from the MDA Produce Safety Program confirming your farm's status and explaining how the rule may apply to your operation.

Thank you in advance for your time and effort to help verify our information.

By submitting this form to the Produce Safety Program, I hereby certify that the information contained in and submitted with this form is true and

432

Grower
questionnaire
responses

5

Minutes to complete
pre-populated form

13

Minutes saved
with pre-
populated form



Doing More with Less: Strategic Engagement & Efficiency

- Intentional Resource Use:
 - Staff time = biggest expense → Focus efforts where impact is highest
 - Realistic about what we cannot do
 - Leverage technology to streamline tasks
- Building Relationships with Farms:
 - Increase touch points through newsletters, mini-grants, and trainings
 - Strengthens farm comfort and engagement over time
- Challenges & Adjustments:
 - The form is voluntary → Still limits response
 - Escalation strategy (calls → letters → visits) helps increase participation and follow-through





Qualified Exempt Challenges

Schools – Qualified End User or Not?

-  **Yes** – When the school **uses the produce in-house** (e.g., cafeteria)
-  **No** – When the school **distributes produce to other schools** in the district

Food Hubs – Qualified End User or Not?

-  **Yes** – When the food hub **sells directly to consumers** (e.g., CSA-style, farmers markets)
-  **No** – When the food hub **sells to grocery stores, schools, restaurants, or distributors**

Working with Buyer – Success Story

- Food Hub in Metro Area
 - Low market entry for growers
 - Buy from 50+ small farms
 - 10-15 “Top Tier” farms contract over \$39,000/year
- Food Safety Focus
 - Food hub audits its own farms, but not food safety experts
 - Created custom food safety requirements aligned with PSR expectations
 - Focused on consistency and risk reduction for their top-tier suppliers
- Collaboration with Produce Safety
 - Top-Tier farms required to complete our Grower Questionnaire (survey)
 - Farms are informed to sell at this level they may be subject to a PSR inspection



Future Modifications & Opportunities

- Data Improvement – Ongoing & Needed
 - Continued data cleaning & remove duplicates
 - Ensure complete contact info (email, address and phone)
- Voluntary Certification Program
 - Non-regulatory, supportive approach
 - Would offer food safety support for QE farms
 - A “steppingstone” toward third-party audits or eventual PSR inspections
- QE Audit Program?
 - Verify accuracy of exemption status
 - Random sampling of QE farms on a rolling basis



Thank You!

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