



Bridging the Gap: Minnesota's Produce Safety Certification Pilot

A scalable, supportive model for small farms and local buyers

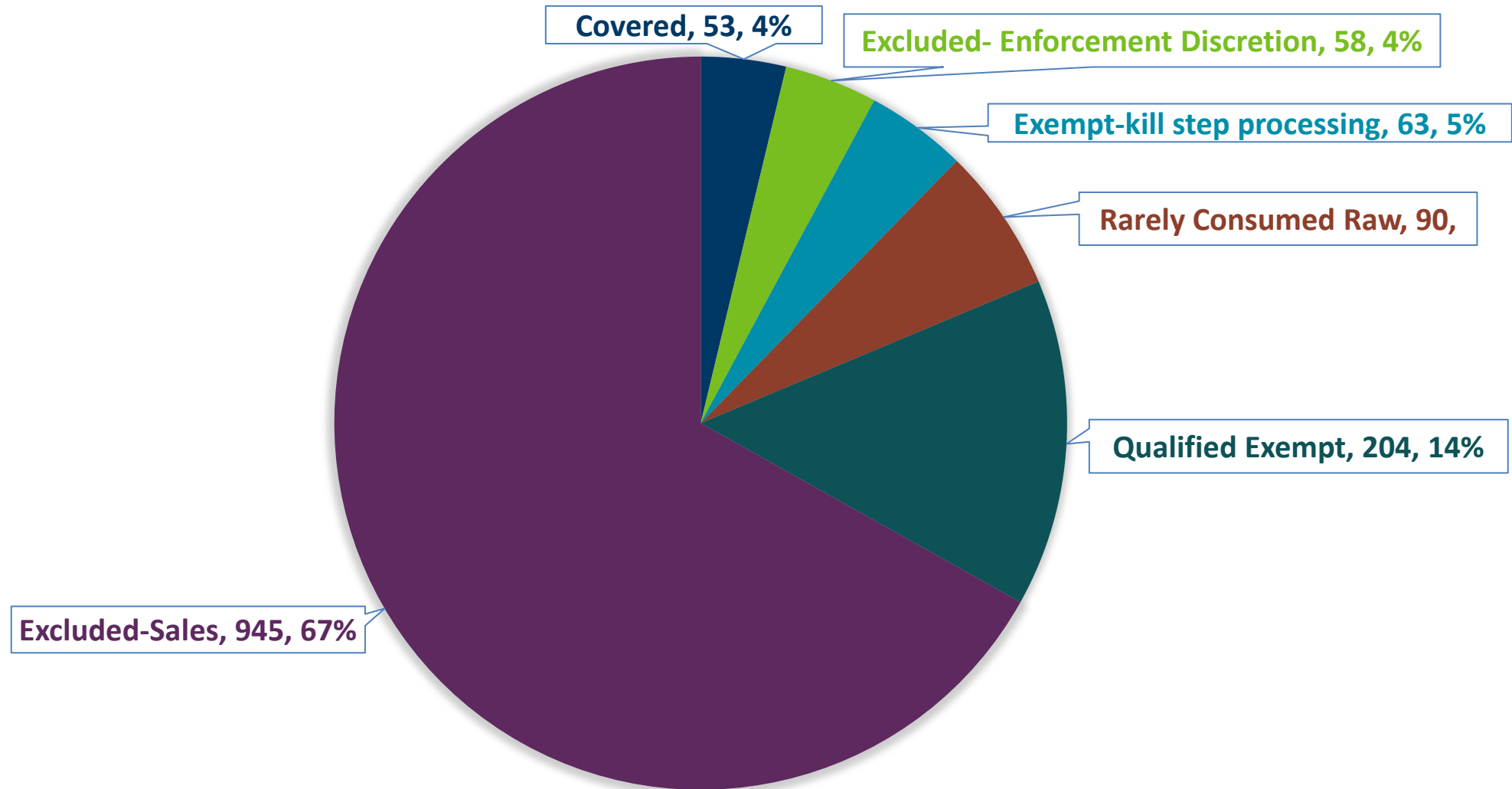
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Minnesota Local Foods Systems



- Minnesota's produce system is dominated by many small farms with short seasons and highly local distribution.
- Most produce is sold at farmers markets & market stands
 - Over 375 farmers markets statewide
- Growing interest to sell to local grocery stores, food hubs and schools
- Very few farms selling to distributors

Minnesota Produce Safety Program Basics





Stakeholder Engagement Project
Statewide outreach to growers, buyers, schools, and associations

Are we meeting the needs?

The Purpose

- Evaluate current food safety services
- Identify if there is a need for additional assurance-related services or support

• Methods

- Emailed Survey
- Phone Calls
- Focus Groups
- Coordination with UMN

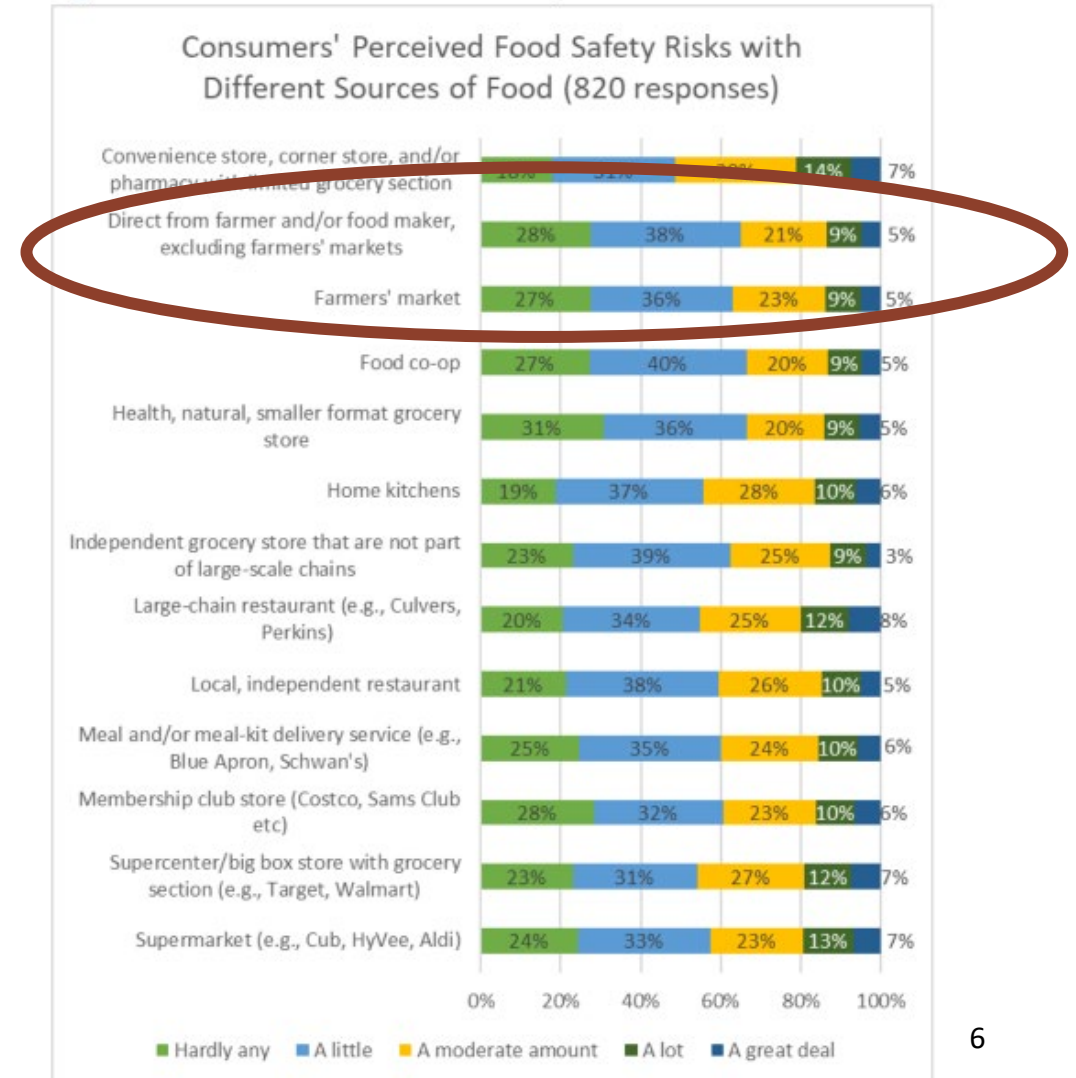
• Who we heard from:

- Produce growers
 - Covered Farms (15)
 - Qualified Exempt (QE)/Micro Exempt (87)
 - Rarely Consumed Raw (10)
 - Hmong famers (6)
- Produce associations/organizations (10)
- Buyers
 - Wholesale (9)
 - Retail/Restaurant/Hospitality (9)
 - Schools (6)

Consumer Studies

- Consumers expect safe food
- Consumers assume farms are inspected
- Small farms = perceived safe

Figure 5. Consumer's Perceived Food Safety Risks with Different Sources of Food

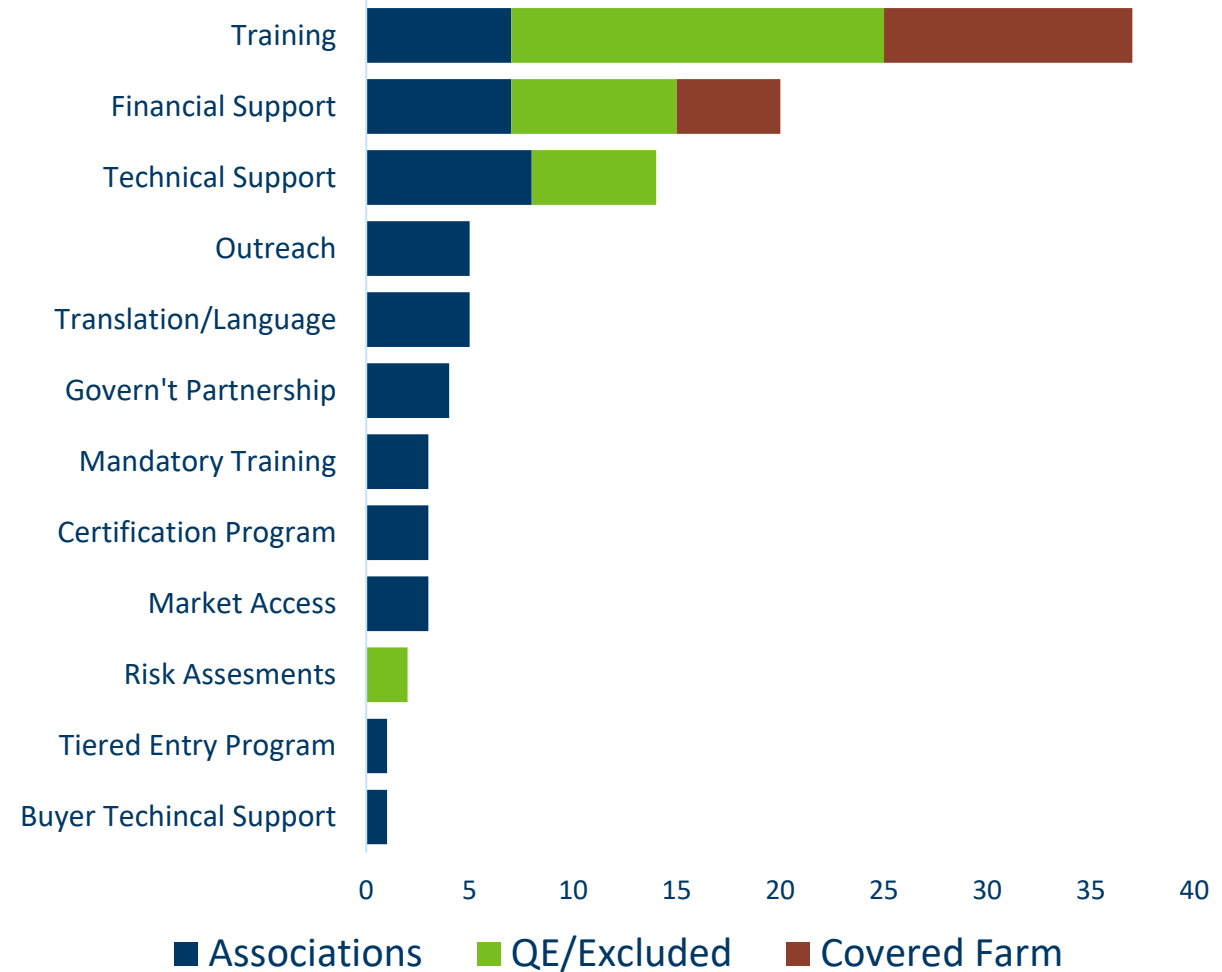


Results: Grower Challenges vs Needs?

Produce Grower Barriers



What Produce Growers Need



Buyer Results

Buyer Type	Do they buy local?	Food Safety Assessment	What can help improve produce safety?
Wholesaler	Only sourcing a few local farms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rely on 3rd party audits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More food safety education of growers • More technical assistance
Retailer	Some, varies based on size of retailer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small farm is safer mentality • 3rd party audit for larger retailers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More support to know what to ask a grower
School	Yes, due to farm to school incentive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small farm is safer mentality • Varying farm expectations • Don't want 3rd party audits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools want Technical Support (on farm) • Educating and prepping farms
Restaurants	Some, varies based on size of restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy from retailers or direct from farmer • Know the farmer – that makes it safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tip sheet /Education for buyers too • Promote cross docking

Perspectives: Inspections & Audits

- Small Farms
 - Low interest; inspections feel burdensome
 - Barriers: cost, time, facilities
- Large Farms
 - Inspections & audits required by buyers
 - Want better alignment & clearer guidance
- Buyers
 - Rely on inspections/audits to reduce risk
 - Need simple, trusted assessments



The Opportunity in Front of Us

- Critical Gaps
 - Buyers need simple, trusted way to verify food safety.
 - Small farms want market access but face real barriers.
 - Consumers assume farms are being inspected—when most in Minnesota are not.
 - There is no existing system that supports small farms and meets buyer needs.
- Opportunity:
 - A voluntary, supportive certification program to fill the gap



Produce Safety Certification Pilot Program

Produce Safety Certification Program Overview

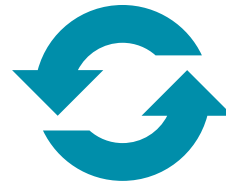
- Voluntary/non-regulatory on farm assessments
- 5-year certification with mid-cycle verification
- Technical support available, as desired
- Certificate to share with buyers
 - Ease burden of evaluating food safety for buyers
- Stepping stone for newer or smaller farms, before audits/PSR

Process to build this system



Created

Farm Application
Rubric & Scoring tool
Initial vs Improved Score Form
Surveys – short term and long term to evaluate markets



Launch

Trial on farms
Obtain feedback /modify
Assess sections too hard/easy
Repeat



Prep for legislative proposal

With experience & data from pilot

SECTION 1 — General Requirements (PSR Subpart A)				
Max Points: 18 Minimum Passing: 13				
#	Requirement	PSR Citation	Harmonized GAP Reference	Score (0–3)
1.1	Farm has a written food safety plan describing practices, risks, and controls, that is updated/reviewed annually	N/A	G-1.1	
1.2	There is a designated food safety person identified for all farm activities	§112.23	G 1.2	
1.3	Farm keeps required records (water inspection(as needed), worker training, food contact sanitation, etc.)	§112.161	G-3.1	
1.4	Corrective action procedures are documented	N/A	G-8.1	
1.5	Traceability system assigns lot codes and maintains sales records	N/A	G 6.1	
	Farm has conducted a recorded self audit(completed this checklist) prior to inspection?	n/a	G-9.1	
Critical Failures:				
	No designated person for farm activities			
	No Food safety plan			

- Used PSR and GAP as a baseline
- Reviewed some buyer requirements online for GAP only topics, chemicals and traceability
- Used AI to help draft
- Inspector review
- Work with Extension
- Test with farms

- What We Hope to Learn

- Will buyers increase local purchasing?
- Interest from growers
- Whether the model works
- Whether food safety improves
- Will it prepare and provide farms an opportunity to grow?

- Long-Term Vision

- Addresses the gap for smaller farms selling locally
- Grows produce farming industry in a safe way
- Improved food safety culture
- Alignment with consumer expectations
- Model for other states

Thank You!

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