



Down to Earth: Reports from the field

Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program (ISFOP): West Central Region

Food Safety on the Farm

by Marlin Bates, Horticulture Specialist, University of Missouri Extension

Growing safe food is vital to all producers. We like to think that we create safe products as a matter of course; however, fresh fruit and vegetable producers must take specific steps to reduce the risk of growing tainted food. It is easy to use safe practices to produce and handle food in the day-to-day business of most farms. First, make an on-farm food safety plan.

At this time, the law does not require producers to have their food safety plan certified. Still, some wholesale buyers now want food safety certification at the time of sale. The Food Safety Modernization Act will soon become law; then, those with more than \$500,000 in sales each year will likely need certification. A third-party auditor will have to verify the food safety plans of these growers. Even growers who do not need certification will find that a food safety plan is useful.

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Spinach, pictured here, was recalled in 15 states in September due to listeria contamination. Photo by Marlin Bates

In the Spot Light: ISFOP update

By Jim Pierce

In 2011 the ISFOP sent out a survey to our small farmer clients in the west central region. The responses helped develop workshop topics for fall 2012. In partnership with the Mattie Rhodes Center, Alianzas and the University of Missouri Extension (UME) and the help of a grant from the North Central Risk Management Education Center (NCRMEC), we organized a series of workshops aimed at existing and new Hispanic small farmers.

In August the first workshop, titled: Vegetable Production, was held at Fair Share Farm in Clay County. Fair Share Farm raises a plethora of vegetables on gently rolling hills east of Kearney. They operate their farm as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. The workshop introduced the topics of Good Agriculture Practices (GAP), Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and sustainable vegetable production. The information was presented on the farm by Dr. Jaime Piñero, Marlin Bates, Rebecca Graff and Tom Ruggieri. The lunch provided showcased local food as well. There was produce from Fair Share Farm prepared by farmers Rebecca and Tom Ruggieri. The beef for the hamburgers was raised by Parker Farms and delivered and grilled by Tom Parker himself!

The second workshop, Small Fruit Production, was held in September at Duncan's Berry Farm and Ladoga Ridge Winery in Clay County. These two farms are located

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Michael Ascencio shares his experiences and insights on operating and establishing a vineyard.

Small Farm Pork Production

by Jeff Yearington



Red Wattle (left) and Berkshire pigs.

There is a growing demand for locally raised food, especially meat. This is where a small pork producer will find advantage in the market. More value will be added by raising animals in a humane, natural, pasture-raised, and/or organic way and labeling the pork as such. Consumers will pay a premium for such products.

Even more value can be added by raising heritage breeds such as Red Wattle and Berkshire, which are enjoying a resurgence in

popularity. The meat from these breeds tend to be more flavorful and is desired by meat lovers and chefs everywhere.

Meeting this market demand will require careful planning on your part to produce the type of product needed. Just as with any farming enterprise, the small hog operation must be based on sound economic principles. Budgets, cash flows, timelines, and markets must guide the establishment of any small hog operation. Important factors are costs of production, processing the animal, and realistic prices.

The issue of processing can be challenging. However, there are still a few small local meat processors that are only able to handle small numbers animals each day, making it an ideal partnership for farmer and processor.

The regulations you will have to follow when selling the animals, such as live hogs direct to the consumer or processed packaged meat, differ according to the marketing strategy you choose. Make sure to know the rules, so you can make informed decisions. They will vary on state, county, and city levels.

To be successful, small pork producers must think harder and more creatively than the larger operator. Their competitive edge lies in lower fixed costs. The small producer will need to find an economical way of raising high quality, niche market hogs and the creativity to direct market the final product. As with any *(continued on page 3)*

ISFOP Update *(cont'd from page 1)*

north of Smithville on the picturesque County Road F and within a quarter of a mile of each other. Duncan's Berry Farm produces blackberries, blueberries, rhubarb and strawberries. Ladoga Ridge Winery is a wine grape producer. In this workshop Marlin Bates delivered information about GAP, the importance of water and strawberry production. Dan Hoerz, owner of Duncan's Berry Farm, gave an overview of the farm production and marketing. Production basics of blueberries and brambles were presented by Jim Pierce. Michael Ascencio, a new grape grower, shared the basics of starting a vineyard and his experiences starting his own vineyard. The lunch was catered by Jason Eastep owner of a local foods catering business, Farm Assist Catering. The menu was a colorful salad of local greens, charcuterie and an array of brats from the local locker, Paradise Locker Meats.

The third workshop, Small Animal Production, was held at Parker Farms Natural Meats in Ray County. The Parker family raises



Rebecca Graaf, Fair Share Farms, operates their Allis G. tractor—the Allis Tom Rugierra, Fair Share Farms, converted to 12 volt DC.

beef, poultry, lamb and pork. Their tidy grass farm is located on County Road F in Ray County. Tom Parker shared a wealth of information and experience about his poultry, hog, and sheep production. Jeff Yearington presented basic pork production and alternative feedstuffs that can be grown on the farm. Susan Jaster shared information about grazing opportunities with sheep that would allow a producer to gain access to pasture and get paid. Jim Pierce discussed Missouri meat laws as they pertain to small producers. The local lunch was Parker Farms delicious pork roast prepared by participant, Jorge Rios-owner and chef of Mi Pueblito restaurant of Kansas City.

That ended our farm production workshops funded by NCRMEC for the year. The partnership has developed a two day track of workshops with the Great Plains Growers Conference that was held in St. Joseph Missouri, January 10 and 11, 2013. These workshops featured Spanish speaking specialists and farmers from the Midwest and east coast. We hope you were able to attend. 🌱

Pork Production (cont'd from page 2)

small farm enterprise, a producer must remember to spend a dollar only when it will return more than a dollar in income.

When first starting off, stick to the basics of pork production. This means no expensive buildings and living within your means. For a product to have value, there must be a market. Small farm pork production is no different. Before starting a new enterprise or expanding an existing one, you need to know what product you are raising and the market for the prod-

uct. For example, you may want to sell only 100 pound roaster pigs, but if there is no place to sell these pigs for an acceptable price, why raise them?

One market you can be sure of is the one demanding local food, but sometimes it can be challenging to get connected to these consumers. Farmers' markets, restaurants, local food expos, and other events focused on food are great places to get connected with the consumer. Do your research and work with your Small Farm Outreach Worker to see if pork production is right for your farm. 🌐

Pork Processors in Missouri

(not a complete list)

Alwel's Country Meats, Warrensburg.
(660) 747-8261 - USDA Inspected

Gilbert Meat Locker, Holden.
(816) 732-6431 - State Inspected

Hetherington Meat Processing, Clinton.
(660) 885-4409 - State Inspected

Remer Meat Company, Clinton.
(660) 885-8335 - USDA Inspected

Food Safety

(cont'd from page 1)

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides guidelines for any grower to develop a food safety plan. They do this through Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP). Producers can use the Audit Verification Checklist. It has a list of all concerns from pre-plant to post-harvest. Growers whose food safety plan will be audited should use the Audit Verification Checklist from the USDA website

(<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5091326>). The checklist will help you prepare for the audit. It is also useful to review a food safety plan that has passed an audit before you prepare your own.

As can be seen from the checklist, most areas of concern relate to worker health and hygiene, water source and use, and manure/compost use. For instance, there is an emphasis on hand washing. In response, farms should have enough hand washing stations that all farm workers have easy access. These stations should have soap and single-use paper towels. For manure use, the USDA GAPs program has the same rule as the National Organic Standards Board. Manure should not be put on fields less than 90 days before harvest for crops whose edible portions do not touch the soil; the rule is 120 days before harvest for crops whose edible portions touch the soil. There are other areas of concern, each with suggested steps to enhance food safety.

Certification is only one way of keeping the food supply safer. Even producers who do not plan to have their food certified should

learn about how critical areas of their production system could increase the chance of microbial (for example, bacterial) contamination. In this way, they can take steps to reduce the risks.

There are a number of audits to choose from. If wholesale buyers request certification, they may state which audit is used. The USDA worked with many audit verification providers to make procedures similar. It has also created the Produce GAPs Harmonized Audit Food Safety Standard Audit, a newer form of the first GAPs Protocol.

For any audit, keeping good records is key. There are many resources to help organize the needed documentation; there are also ways to streamline the process of preparing for an audit. The National GAPs program can be found online at <http://www.gaps.cornell.edu/>. There, producers can see guides on food safety topics. They can also find self-assessment workbooks with best practices, training videos for farm employees and signs to post on farms.

Consumers are always mindful of food safety concerns. Today, more produce buyers want a way to verify food safety. Now is the best time to prepare for this audit process.

As a rule, audits must be done while the crop is in the ground. That makes the winter months the best time to do much of the work leading up to the audit. If you would like to start a food safety plan on your farm, get help from an extension expert. You can also attend workshops that help you create an on-farm food safety plan.

To learn more about the USDA Good Agricultural/Handling Practices program, visit their website at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov>. 🌐



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If you are interested in implementing a food safety plan on your farm, seek the assistance of an Extension professional and attend educational workshops designed to help you put together an on-farm food safety plan.

ISFOP

If you are a small farmer and need information, please contact an ISFOP Farm Outreach Worker (FOW). FOWs live and work in your community. They can provide information on ways to better manage your resources, reduce expense and increase income. They can also provide information on other programs and resources that may increase your income and the overall quality of life for you and your family.

You are eligible to participate if:

- Your family lives on a farm, rural or urban.
- Farm products or income from the farm are necessary for you to live where you do.
- Your family provides the management and most of the labor for your farm.
- Your total annual family income is less than \$50,000.

How to Contact

West Central Regional ISFOP Farm Outreach Workers:

- **Katie Nixon**, West Central Regional Coordinator and Jackson County
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Are Meat Goats for you? By Janet Hurst

As the number of small farms grows, it is worth considering new products. Look for open slots in the market and places where demand is unfulfilled. You can also find specialty markets, where there are opportunities to sell your product. One such option, suitable to any sized farm, is raising goats for meat.

Demand for goat meat is on the rise. This is due to a rise in the US population and changes in its cultural diversity. Goat is the preferred meat for many holiday and cultural feasts. Certain goat breeds are best suited for producing meat. Boers (rhymes with "cores") are probably the most well-known breed grown for meat. They originated in South Africa. These animals are easily recognized with a unique coloring; they have a nearly all-white body with a red, brown or black head. Boer goats have a good rate of weight gain and great carcass quality. The highest demand in the meat market is for the kid stock, weighing in at about 50-80 pounds. Most buyers and those that process the goats prefer an unaltered male with horns intact. But buyers have their own set of standards for what is desirable when buying an animal. For this reason, it is important to learn these standards before entering into production so that buyers will be satisfied.

There are many other meat goat breeds. Spanish meat goats were imported to the United States by early American settlers.

Tennessee meat goats are often called "fainting goats" because their muscles seize when they are startled. When this happens, the goats literally topple over until their muscles relax. The New Zealand Kiko goat is also known as a hardy meat animal. This breed is often smaller boned but usually has a higher muscle-to-bone ratio. Savanna goats are becoming more popular. They are similar in stature to Boers and have a larger body frame than the Kiko.

With all animals, especially with goats, fencing is a key concern. Make sure to have fence installed before bringing home the first animal. Goats are inquisitive animals, so fencing is essential. As with their dairy goat cousins,



Boer goats. Photo courtesy of Kim Carr

parasite management is also important in order to establish a healthy herd. Speak to your local veterinarian, and ask for ways to manage parasites. Also, observe your animals daily to detect signs of illness or other problems before anything serious occurs.

Goats need proper nutrition. One myth of goat keeping is that these animals can survive without good quality feed. To gain weight and maintain overall good health, nutritious food must be available.

Before you begin goat production, talk to your local veterinarian or area goat specialist to learn how to maintain your animals. As with any new endeavor, time spent in planning will pay off. 🌐