Meeting Producer Food Safety Needs

through the

Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

Beth Oleson Fresh Produce Safety Symposium 2010 Raleigh, NC



Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association

- Producer initiated and directed organization that began in 1996
- Goals:

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- Serve as the VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY
 - Government Relations and Communications
- Provide EDUCATION
- Offer MEMBERSHIP SERVICES to reduce production costs & expand markets

Membership Services

- Transportation Program
- 3rd Party Pesticide License
- Marketing Program
- Donnie H Morris Excellence in Extension
- Food Safety Program
- Many more...

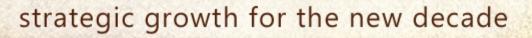


National Involvement

- Legislative Involvement
- Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance
- United Fresh Produce Association
 - Board of Directors

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- Government Relations Committee
- Food Safety and Technology Committee



National Involvement

- GAP Harmonization Initiative
 - Steering Committee & Technical Working Group
- Food Safety Program and Auditing Protocol for the Fresh Tomato Supply Chain (Tomato Audit Harmonization)



Our History



Set the Stage...

1998 FDA Industry Guidance:

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"Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable"

 Food safety industry grew rapidly with little initial education

– It was very expensive and a little "shady"

The Beginning...

- Producers approached the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers (GFVGA) for help with education and prep for audits
- After some research and interest, collaboration began.



The Beginning...

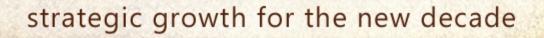
Georgia GAP Food Safety Committee:

- GA Crop Improvement Association
 - auditing firm
- GFVGA

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- Administration/Consultation/Education
- GA Dept of Agriculture
 - Regulate and Pesticide Auditing
- UGA Food Science & Horticulture
 - Education & Best Practices



The Beginning...

USDA Block Grant Funds

Seed money for materials, personnel, trainings, etc.

UGA Extension

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- Agents & researchers created train the trainer materials
- Traveled the state educating agents and producers

TOOL DEVELOPMENT

- Food Safety Manual
- Consultation
- Education
- Training Tools

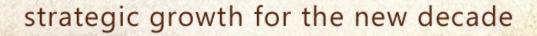


Documentation Development

- GA GAP Committee created:
 - SOPs
 - SSOPs
 - Documentation Examples
 - Standards

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 Audits for field, harvest crew & packing facilities



Program Growth

- Primus Labs became highly sought after and we were able meet that audit need
 - Auditors are GA GAP and Primus Labs certified
- As the need grew, the program grew.
 - Several part-time coordinators to a full time coordinator and part time field consultant
 - Increased certified auditors from 2 to 5



Consultation

- Consult at the farm or packing facility:
 - Mock Audit of the field, harvest crew, physical building & equipment
 - Goal: Find more than the auditor would ever find

Thoroughly cover SOPs and paperwork

 Biggest question: "How should I organize the SOPs and documentation?"



Consultation

- A physical consultation is <u>INVALUABLE</u>
- Speak in laymen's terms but educate on WHY "it" must be done
 - WHY do I have to keep boxes stored off the floor?
 - WHY do I have to clean the packing line everyday?

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- Analogy: Give them a fish v. teach them to fish

Handout & Tools

- GA GAP Food Safety Manual
 - SOPs, SSOPs, Record Keeping in Checklists and Documentation

Training Materials

- DVD's, tabletop, etc.
- GA GAP Website



Handout & Tools

- Pre-Audit Checklists
 - Field and Packing Facility
- Workshops
 - August 2010 Be Recall Ready
- Research Funded by Georgia Vegetable Commission

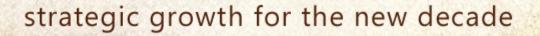


Education

- Producer meetings to educate and debunk food safety myths
 - UGA Extension Production meeting
 - Grower/Broker group meeting
 - SE Regional Conference
 - National meetings

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Regional Food Safety meetings



Diversification

- <u>Consultation</u> services are not limited to GA GAP or Primus Labs
 - Several producer organizations contract with GA GAP annually to prepare/consult with their grower members and/or conduct 2nd party audits
- Global GAP, UC Davis

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Harvest is Plentiful but the Workers are Few...

- GA GAP Program is unique
- Many state DOAs and state associations have seen/heard the need and are seeking to meet it:
 - North Carolina South Carolina
 - Tennessee Iowa
 - Alabama

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- National Watermelon Association...

Future

- Hire a more part time field consultants
- Increase consultations, educational opportunities and resources for producers and shippers
 - http://gfvga.org/GAGAP

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- Online food safety document tool
- Collaboration with other organizations

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