Field to Fork: Enhancing the Safe Use of North Dakota Specialty Crops

The Situation
Ensuring safe, nutritious food is critical not only for the consumer, but also for the specialty crops growers. Foodborne illnesses related to fresh fruits and vegetables have risen in recent years. In response, food entrepreneurs need to understand food safety practices in growing, transporting, processing and preserving fruits and vegetables.

Extension Response
A multi-disciplinary team of 14 Extension educators and industry persons participated in offering an educational project to enhance the knowledge and safe food handling of specialty fruit and vegetable crops from “field to fork.” A comprehensive website was developed for new and existing Extension information about certain specialty crops. Ten Field to Fork handouts were developed for use in farmers’ markets. An online mini-course was created using Versal software. Additional marketing materials were developed and a series of 14 webinars was offered during the year.

Impacts
More than 450 people attended the 14 webinars, which were archived on YouTube for future use and had 1,415 views and 14 shares. The webinars have been viewed for a total of 13,431 minutes. More than 4,769 visitors (3,875 unique visits) visited the website. They viewed a total of 10,918 pages. The most popular pages on the website are the field to fork webinar registration page and the “choose your crop” pages, particularly apples and tomatoes.

Feedback
Respondents indicated they plan to try planting fall crops, use high tunnels, keep better production records, purchase suggested seed varieties, start creating a food safety plan, and change what they produce for farmers markets. Some of their comments were “I will let vendors know what needs to be on labels for home-canned goods”; “I will wash my hands before working with fresh produce, not just after”; “I will be more careful where and when manure compost is used”; and “I will get a pH meter if selling my processed foods.”

Public Value Statement
An increasing number of people are growing fruits and vegetables for both personal and commercial purposes. Nutrition experts recommend greater intake of vegetables and fruits, making safe production a public health priority.

Primary Contacts
David Saxowsky, Ag Law Specialist
701-231-7470
david.saxowsky@ndsuy.edu

Julie Garden-Robinson, Food and Nutrition Specialist
701-231-7187
Julie.garden-robinson@ndsu.edu

Robert Bertsch, Web Technology Specialist
701-231-7381
Robert.bertsch@ndsu.edu