

United Fresh Produce Association
Food Safety Fiscal Year 2020: Year in Review
July 15, 2020

Promoting safe produce practices across borders

- Worked with the papaya industry, FDA, SENASICA, and researchers in the US and Mexico to develop a science-based best practices guide in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#) to prevent outbreaks. To date, over 150 Mexican papaya growers have been formally trained on the best practices, and FDA acknowledged the effort in a letter to industry.
- Support the technical updates and interpretive alignment of the Harmonized Standard, which allows producers each year demonstrate their food safety practices, increasing their market access
 - Working with the Technical Working group and Calibration Committee, published version 2.0 of the [Combined Harmonized Standard](#) in April, 2020
 - At the request of the Calibration Committee, created a [series of infographics](#) to further understanding of the Harmonized Standard
 - Almost 2500 Harmonized certificates issued in 2019, creating market access for very small growers who may otherwise go without a food safety audit, and providing an efficient, focused audit for very large operations who can instead focus on food safety in their day-to-day operations rather than one day a year to simply pass the audit.
- Contributed to the publication of the [Root Cause Analysis Case Study](#) to demonstrate how the principles of root cause analysis can be put into practice to investigate an issue related to fresh produce.
- Created the “[Key Questions Around Sampling and Testing Fresh Produce](#)” document, which includes “how-tos” of a testing program for the industry, as well as how to interpret, act upon, and communicate a positive finding.
- Developed a [Zone 1 guidance document](#) for fresh produce operations and [Zone 1 infographic](#) to help describe the decision-making processes associated with Z1 sampling and provide recommended approaches in the event of a positive finding.
- Represented the fresh produce industry at over 25 meetings of the broader food sector

Shaping Produce Safety Policies and Regulations

- Helped shape FDA’s recently released “[New Era of Smarter Food Safety](#)” [blueprint](#) by providing formal oral and written comments, as well as responding to off-record FDA requests
- Submitted detailed technical comments to a Codex Alimentarius workgroup developing a global standard for agricultural water. Had United Fresh not intervened, there would be an erroneous global water standard
- Discouraged FDA from using the proposed rule on laboratory accreditation as a back door to force the industry to share food safety test results with FDA
- Provided FDA with a proposed redline of the agricultural water provision to the Produce Safety Rule, in anticipation of the agency releasing a revision to that rule. As written, the rule, which is in abeyance, is unmanageable and not protective of public health.

Crisis Response

- Last Thanksgiving, United Fresh single-handedly stopped USDA FSIS from mandating a recall of all romaine-containing items

For more information, visit www.unitedfresh.org
or contact Dr. Jennifer McEntire, SVP Food Safety & Technology jmcentire@unitedfresh.org

- Performed and provided updated analyses of 2016-2019 romaine outbreaks linked by whole genome sequencing
- Our relationship with FDA and CDC allowed us to alert members to a forthcoming advisory on Mexican papayas, allowing the industry to proactively protect consumers
- Brought a scientific and practical perspective to the [Blue Ribbon panel](#) on Cyclospora
 - Held [Cyclospora webinar](#) on how to avoid contamination in fresh produce operations
 - Led Partnership for Food Safety Education [webinar](#) on the consumer explanation of Cyclospora
- Refined “provenance labeling” for romaine items, and facilitated consumer understanding by serving as an industry expert to a Partnership for Food Safety Education [webinar](#), avoiding the shut-down of the full romaine supply chain

COVID-19

- Provided the industry with information on the pandemic starting February 2, and launched a [COVID-19 Linked](#) in page for the produce industry in March, 2020, which now has over 1,325 subscribers
- Continue to post timely information on our [COVID-19 resources page](#), organized by resources for consumers, industry, and detailing the specific initiatives United Fresh has actively engaged in.
- By working with media, industry partners, FDA, and posting information on our [consumer-facing COVID webpage](#), actively dispelled the notion that food, and especially produce, can transmit the virus
- Immediately engaged with other food and beverage trade associations to develop [guidance](#) for industry in the absence of federal guidance
 - Within days, developed guidance on [how to handle an employee testing positive](#), [social distancing](#) and [other mitigations for food facilities](#), [a decision tree related to testing and illness](#), [specific guidance for farmers and their employees](#).
 - Used the food safety and government relations communities to share the latest information
- Served as one of five representatives of the food and beverage industry on a DHS-FEMA workgroup to address PPE needs
- Actively engaged with the Food and Ag Sector Coordinating Council of DHS to ensure that the definition of “critical infrastructure” employees included the breadth of United Fresh membership
- Worked via the Partnership for Food Safety Education to develop a [consumer-facing video discouraging washing produce with bleach or soap](#) released on March 20, with almost 5,000 views

Supporting Meaningful Produce Safety Research and Innovation

- Developed and posted a [Vendor Assessment tool](#) to help industry evaluate new innovations and technologies that are presented to them; vendors can also use the tool to help guide the development of marketing and technical materials
- Fielded calls from dozens of academics and entrepreneurs to provide guidance and insight on industry needs and wrote over 25 [letters of support](#) in 2020
- Financially support the [Center for Produce Safety](#), which funded 12 research projects in 2019
 - Also led the crafting of the request for research proposals for 2020, served as technical reviewers for the research proposals, and serve on the Center’s Board of Directors

For more information, visit www.unitedfresh.org
or contact Dr. Jennifer McEntire, SVP Food Safety & Technology jmcentire@unitedfresh.org

- Reviewed multi-million dollar research proposals to the [USDA Specialty Crop Research Initiative](#) to ensure maximal benefit to the produce industry (this funding program exists because of United's lobbying efforts in the [Farm Bill](#))
 - Serve on the advisory committees of two funded projects, as a liaison to the industry

Developing Capacity and Competency of Produce Safety Professionals

- Launched the lauded [Produce Safety Immersion Program](#), an elite group of 14 budding professionals and has held 20+ virtual and in-person education and networking sessions for program participants
- Held 9 Food Safety sessions during the United Fresh LIVE! Virtual Convention, with over 2,000 views and 1,200 individual participants from around the world
- Held 10 [food safety webinars](#) in the past year which brought in 1,500+ registrations, including one Spanish webinar
- Hosted 9 [Food Safety trainings](#), including FSVP, Listeria, Harmonized and Recall Ready workshops that trained 300 food safety professionals from across the industry

Member Support

- Supported several members with confidential, 24/7 assistance during recalls and other food safety crises.
- Provided personal, detailed responses to over 500 food safety member inquiries, including review of various food safety plans
- Keep nearly 4,000 staff at member companies informed about need-to-know produce safety information through regular email updates

Traceability

- As part of [PTI](#), developed and gained buyer acceptance of a Harmonized PTI label, which will increase adoption of PTI, enhancing supply chain wide traceability
- Through the [Romaine Task Force](#) and PTI, developed and [published a template](#) for industry to respond to a regulatory request for traceback data
 - United Fresh is playing an integral role in a 6-association effort to pilot the template and trace romaine from a consumer purchase to its origin, in support of FDA's "new era" blueprint and Leafy Green STEC Action Plan