

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Offers produce safety program virtually during COVID-19

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MADISON — To continue serving Wisconsin produce farmers during the public health emergency, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is offering virtual On-Farm Readiness Reviews (OFRRs), a program that helps growers prepare to comply with the Produce Safety Rule.

An OFRR is a non-regulatory assessment of a produce farm's safety practices, and the program assists producers to make sure those practices align with federal regulations. The Produce Safety Rule was created as part of the Food Safety Modernization Act, which passed in 2011 in an effort to shift U.S. supply safety efforts from response to prevention.

In 2019, DATCP's Safe Wisconsin Produce team conducted 32 in-person OFRRs at produce farms. Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in March temporarily suspended on-site visits to slow the spread of the virus. DATCP is committed to scheduling OFRR video calls with produce farms until the FDA lifts its order and allows on-site visits to resume.

"We have seen the demand for OFRRs increase year after year, so we want to adapt to the current situation and ensure that Wisconsin produce growers have access to the technical support they are requesting," said Shawn Bartholomew, DATCP Produce Safety supervisor.

OFRRs are voluntary and come at no cost to producers. During the assessment,

DATCP will review what does and does not align with federal regulations and, if necessary, guide producers through resources to learn more about best practices.

Growers who have already scheduled an in-person OFRR have the option of a virtual assessment or rescheduling once FDA suspensions are lifted. Producers can schedule a virtual OFRR any time during the growing season by emailing SafeProduce@wi.gov, calling (608) 224-4511, or visiting the Safe Produce website at <http://safeproduce.wi.gov>. Virtual OFRRs must be scheduled at least 10 business days in advance.

More information

- DATCP Safe Produce website: <http://safeproduce.wi.gov>
- Food Safety Modernization Act and Produce Safety Rule: https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/SafeWIProduceAbout.aspx