



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Loudoun County  
Program Title: On Farm Readiness Review Program  
Program Category: Environmental/Economic Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Jim Hilleary  
Title: Extension Agent: Animal/Crop Science Unit Coordinator - Department Director  
Department: Extension Services  
Telephone: (703) 777-0373 Website: www.loudoun.gov/extension  
Email: Jim.Hilleary@vt.edu

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Tim Hamstreet  
Title: County Administrator  
Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

## **On Farm Readiness Review Program**

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension - Loudoun County, Virginia**

#### **Program Overview**

In 2018, Loudoun County's Department of Extension Services' (DES) seized an opportunity to develop a program to help the county's 51 vegetable operations – which collectively generate sales of \$1.28 million -- comply with the FDA's most sweeping produce regulatory reform in over 80 years.

With the adoption of the 2011 Federal Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was given new authority to ensure the safety of the food supply for humans and animals. As part of that act, the Produce Safety Rule (PSR) establishes science-based, minimum standards for the safe growing, harvesting, packing, and holding of fruits and vegetables grown for human consumption.

In-field, PSR compliance inspections are scheduled to begin in 2019, which gave state and county agencies an opportunity in 2018 to guide, train, provide technical assistance, and help growers plan for their response.

Loudoun's **On-Farm Readiness Review program** was led by the county's Food Safety Agent (FSA), who, as a first step, voluntarily attained the national certification required to implement FDA's national On Farm Readiness Review Program (OFRR).

He then joined with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service's (VDACS) Produce Safety Team to form the Commonwealth's **only joint, single county-state team** to travel to farms and guide producers through the compliance inspection process in preparation for subsequent actual VDACS inspections.

Together, VDACS and the DES' Food Safety Agent introduced growers to the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Foundation's (NASDA) OFFR curriculum and helped growers address all portions of the law before they have to comply with the regulation.

Loudoun's collaborative approach creates an excellent example of increasing municipal resource impacts that other county agents can emulate across the Commonwealth.

#### **Problem/Challenge Faced**

According to the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture, 51 vegetable operations exist in Loudoun County; collectively they generate sales of \$1,282,000, a noteworthy amount for a local industry. It is

important to guide county growers through the FDA's most sweeping produce regulatory reform in over 80 years for FSMA will influence management practices involving:

- Health and hygiene
- Biological soil amendments of animal origin
- Domesticated and wild animals
- Preharvest worker training
- Preharvest Sanitation
- Preharvest Water
- Harvest worker training
- Harvest sanitation
- Harvest water
- Postharvest worker training
- Postharvest Sanitation
- Postharvest water

The Food Safety Modernization Act will be enforced consistently, whether on a very large farm which only grows one produce crop or on a small farm that grows many different produce crops. Growers of fresh produce – no matter how large or small -- are required to understand and implement an incredibly detailed rule, which can be a daunting task. This requires technical food safety knowledge and the ability to implement such knowledge on an individual farming operation in which there are no two alike.

County-level outreach to VDACS is instrumental to PSR implementation success -- for it is the county extension agents who best know the produce growers in each county. Their existing relationships bring trust and credibility to the state's efforts which benefits the growers and the county government as well as the state government.

### **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

The Loudoun County FSA's forward-leaning participation benefits both local produce growers and VDACS alike by leveraging local relationships and connections to reach a wider audience across the Commonwealth. Such an individually tailored approach provides a customized service to produce growers in order to assist them overcome the stated challenge.

Loudoun DES's FSA attained the certification required to partner with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service's (VDACS) Produce Safety team to conduct OFRRs for growers who wish to participate. The FSA serves to connect the VDACS Produce Safety Team with local growers and then participates in the OFFR visits in-person. The FSA helps both the Product Safety Team and the grower throughout the process by explaining the law and identifying changes to best management practices to better comply with the PSR. Each farm visit takes approximately 2 hours, and typically

provides growers with 3 main areas to improve upon. The program is confidential for the grower and is completely free.

Other food safety agents in the Commonwealth work with VDACS to provide similar OFFR visits; however, those agents represent multi-county regions within Virginia or Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Subsequent to the OFFR visits, DES's FSA may follow up with growers who want to make changes that bring their operation into compliance with the law.

### **Program Results**

Since the program began in 2018, VCE Loudoun's Food safety agent has conducted thirteen On Farm Readiness Reviews in partnership with the VDACS produce safety team throughout the state.

He has provided technical assistance to many of these growers in order to assist them with changes they seek to implement on their operation -- a service that cannot be performed by VDACS.

This program is currently operational and will seek to serve as many produce growers throughout the state as possible in preparation for the commencement of regulation in 2019 by the VDACS produce safety team.