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## New Report on Food Safety Pilot Project in the U.P. Gets Statewide Attention

Food safety has become more important than ever to farmers, food hubs, and food buyers in the past few years as federal regulations change in response to foodborne illness outbreaks. Can small farms comply with the same standards that large-scale farming operations employ to protect the food supply without getting forced out of business?

In order to better understand how food safety certification would look for small farms, and to offer practical best practices and expert advice, a group of ten farms in the Upper Peninsula underwent food safety certification last year as part of an ongoing pilot project. The U.P. Food Exchange, a partnership between the Marquette Food Co-op and MSU Extension with support from the Western Upper Peninsula Health Department, participated in a federal-level group food safety certification pilot project. This project was sponsored by USDA and The Wallace Center at Winrock International and funded by Michigan Food & Farming Systems (MIFFS) through a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant program (administered by MDARD) and the U.P. Food Exchange.

The aim of the project is to study how small farms fit into USDA's established Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) food safety certification program, which was designed for large scale farming operations. The project goal is to test how small farms might benefit by certifying as a group. Projected benefits might include, but are not limited to, sharing the expense of inspection, farmer-to-farmer learning and support as well as in-depth food safety and documentation training.

The newly released case study, *Small Farmers Can Make Food Safety Work: The GroupGAP Pilot in Michigan's Upper Peninsula*, published by the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, provides an overview of the process, challenges, benefits, and lessons learned from the Group Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) pilot project. Funding for the publication was provided by the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

"We all want to have safe food, and we also want small farmers to continue to have access to a variety of direct and intermediated food markets," says Rich Pirog, Senior Associate Director of the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems. Preparing small farms to compete in a changing food safety landscape increases the likelihood that they can maintain relationships with institutional purchasers like grocery stores and even expand their businesses.

You can read the study, here:

[http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/group\\_gap\\_pilot\\_upper\\_peninsula](http://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/group_gap_pilot_upper_peninsula)

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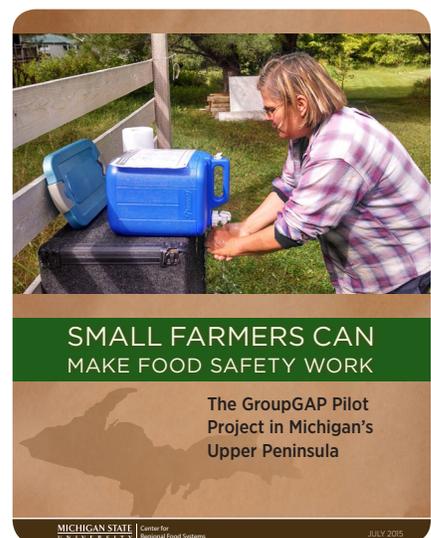
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