

PRODUCE SAFETY ALPHABET SOUP - WHAT DO ALL THOSE ACRONYMS MEAN?

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Have you ever been to a workshop or lecture about food safety on the farm and felt like the speakers were using a different language? This factsheet will help you decode all of those acronyms and understand the similarities and differences between them.

Food Safety Decoder

Acronym	Definition
FSMA	Food Safety Modernization Act
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
OFRR	On-Farm Readiness Review
PSA Grower Training	Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training
PSR	Produce Safety Rule
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
TAEP	Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program

Table 1. Commonly Used Acronyms in Produce Safety

The **FSMA** (Food Safety Modernization Act), signed into law in 2011, is the first ever federal standard for food safety. This law also holds imported foods to the same standards as food produced here in the U.S. The FSMA focuses on prevention of food safety issues and has seven different sections or rules that encompass all parts of the food system, including human and animal food.

The **PSR** (Produce Safety Rule) is one of those sections and it outlines the minimum, science-based safety precautions required by farms growing fresh fruit and vegetables. The PSR gives detailed regulations for farms focusing on potential routes of microbial contamination, including worker health and hygiene, soil amendments, wildlife and domesticated animals, agricultural water, and postharvest handling and sanitation.

The FSMA-PSR is quite long and detailed. Tennessee growers falling under this rule will be inspected by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) to ensure compliance. Whether you are affected depends on what you grow, your annual sales, and who buys your produce. There are several guides to determine whether your operation falls under the rule, including this flow chart from the FDA (<https://www.fda.gov/media/94332/download>) and this 7-minute video from the University of Minnesota (<https://extension.umn.edu/growing-safe-food/fsma-and-produce-safety-rule-does-rule-apply-me>).

The PSR states that at least one person from each farm must complete training to learn the requirements of the law. The **PSA** (Produce Safety Alliance) Grower Training is a standardized curriculum approved by the FDA to satisfy this mandate. This course is offered both virtually over two half-days and in-person for one full day. In Tennessee, UT Extension offers this course multiple times a year and also by request for groups of 10 or more. A list of all upcoming grower trainings can be found here: <https://cals.cornell.edu/produce-safety-alliance/training/grower-training-course/upcoming-grower-trainings>.

One other acronym that goes along with the FSMA PSR is **OFRR** or On-Farm Readiness Review. An OFRR is a voluntary program where personnel from either UT Extension and/or the TDA come to your farm to walk around and observe your growing conditions, harvesting practices, packinghouse operation, and water sources. At the end of the discussion, the reviewers provide suggestions for your farm to improve food safety practices. For those who fall under the FSMA PSR, the OFRR can serve as a pre-inspection to help you get ready for your inspection. For growers that do not fall under the rule, an OFRR can help give ideas to jumpstart your farm food safety program. The OFRR is purely educational; growers who request one will not receive any kind of certificate of completion nor any regulatory actions at the conclusion of the exercise.

Conversely, growers will receive a certification for **GAP** (Good Agricultural Practices) audits. These are voluntary audits conducted by a third party based on best practices for growing, harvesting, packing, and transporting produce to minimize the risk of contamination with foodborne illness. Many retailers such as grocery stores, restaurants, and schools require the produce they purchase to come from GAP certified farms. Growers wishing to become certified must contact a third-party auditing agency, pay a fee, and schedule a farm inspection. All GAP audits are different depending on the certifying agency; some audit schemes cover worker welfare or other standards along with field and packinghouse operations. Growers wishing to become GAP certified can learn how to choose a GAP audit, how to prepare for the audit, and where to find resources to help pay for an audit in the UT Extension publication "Update on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Audits in Tennessee" <https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/SP746-B.pdf>.

When implementing new food safety practices on the farm, it can be helpful to write **SOPs** (standard operating procedures). SOPs are written directions for common farm tasks to ensure all employees are completing the task the same way. SOPs should be easily accessible for all employees or posted in plain view of where the task will take place. Simpler is better with SOPs; they should be written concisely and when possible, include pictures. An example SOP can be seen in Figure 1, and you can find more information on how to write an SOP here: <https://cornell.app.box.com/s/rj7wj2dta5bflua783jl45ctjqj3c7w9>.

The **TAEP** or Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program is a cost-share program run by the TDA. Specialty crop growers can apply for funding through their Producer Diversification Program for supplies or equipment on the farm to bolster food safety programs. Examples include installing a cooler on the farm, upgrading wooden crates to easily sanitized plastic crates or building a packinghouse to enclose the packing area. Applications are typically due in October each year. Check <https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/farms/taep.html> regularly for up-to-date applications and eligibility requirements.

While food safety is full of acronyms, they all fit together to help you build a strong produce safety program on your farm.

Sample SOP: Cleaning and Sanitizing Surfaces, Tools, and Equipment

Revision: 3.0

Date: MM/DD/2020

1—Purpose

Describes how food contact surfaces, tools, and equipment are to be cleaned and sanitized.

2—Scope

Applies to farm and packinghouse personnel including farm owners and workers.

3—Responsibility

Workers are responsible for following the SOPs to properly clean and sanitize food contact surfaces. Farm owners and food safety managers are responsible for training the workers on proper technique, providing necessary resources such as tools, detergents and sanitizers, and making sure the cleaning and sanitizing steps are followed correctly.

4—Materials

- Detergent name, brand, and concentration (labeled for use on food contact surfaces) **[Provide name here]**
- Sanitizer name, brand, and concentration **[Provide name here]**
- Container(s) as needed for mixing and using detergent(s) and sanitizer(s) or for washing tools
- Brushes, sponges, or towels for scrubbing tools and equipment
- Clean water (microbial equivalent to drinking water)

5—Procedure

1. The surface should be brushed or rinsed with water to remove visible dirt and debris. Any water used for this step must contain no detectable generic *E. coli* in a 100 mL water sample.
2. Prepare the detergent **[Add detergent mixing or preparation instructions here]**.
3. Apply the prepared detergent solution and scrub the surfaces moving in the direction top to bottom for large pieces of equipment. Detergent should be mixed according to the product instructions.
4. Rinse the surface with clean water until all soap suds are rinsed away moving in the direction top to bottom for large pieces of equipment.
5. Prepare the sanitizer. **[Add sanitizer mixing or preparation instructions here]**.
6. Apply the prepared sanitizer solution. Allow it to sit for **[Enter number of minutes according to product instructions]** minutes.
7. Rinse with clean water.
8. Let the surface air dry.
9. Document the cleaning and sanitation activity in a sanitation log.

On-Farm Decision Tree Project. E.A. Bihn, M.A. Schermann, A.L. Wszelaki, G.L. Wall, and S.K. Amundson, 2014. Updated 2020 by I F Acuña-Maldonado, F A Bihn, D P Clements, C I Fisk, T P Saunders, D M Stoeckel, G I Wall, and K Woods

<https://gaps.cornell.edu>

Figure 1. Example SOP for cleaning and sanitizing surfaces, tools, and equipment. Notice that the SOP is only one page that clearly outlines the purpose of the task, scope of employees expected to complete the task, responsibility of workers, materials needed, and steps to complete the task.



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