

Food Safety Certification Amp Standard Operating Procedures for your Food Hub Webinar Transcript

Noel: Farm Fresh Rhode Island is a 501(c)(3) not for profit founded in 2004. They began aggregating and distributing locally grown foods in 2009, PHC and since 2009 they moved over 7 1/2 million dollars in local foods through their distribution programs. Hannah is the program director for Food Systems Enterprise at Farm Fresh Rhode Island and she works with Farm Fresh's aggregation distribution programs including Market Mobile and Veggie Box. She's going to talk a bit more about. Hannah has been working a great deal on developing food safety programs for Farm Fresh Rhode Island including good handling practices and standard operating procedures. She's going to talk about her experiences working on those projects and also about some toolkits, which she's been working on for Food Hubs in that area. We had planned to have Hannah here in Michigan for this webinar, and we were looking forward to having her visit, but the weather out east has had other plans so unfortunately Hannah is stuck in Providence, but we're fortunate to have her joining us remotely through the webinar so we're really glad that this worked out and we're hoping to get her out to Michigan at some point, likely when there's not much of a chance of snow, so with that I'm going to hand over the mic to you Hannah and, again, if folks have questions feel free to enter those in the Chat Box and we will get to them as they come up, so thank you and here you go.

Hannah Mellion: Okay great, well thank you so much Noel and, yeah it's just been crazy weather. I don't know if anyone has been following the weather on the East Coast, but I was bummed that my flights got cancelled and but I'm very happy to be here and continue to be able to do some work with the Michigan Food Hub through the webinar today. So as Noel said I'll be talking about some food safety certification particularly talking about the Good Handling Practices webinar, so I'll start going through some slides and if you have any questions you can write them in on the Chat Box and we'll save some time at the end for questions. So today I'm going to a little introduction to Farm Fresh Rhode Island and our programs. I'm going to talk a little bit about the benefits and costs of third party certification. I'm going to do an overview of the Good Handling Practices audit. I'm going to talk a little bit about a toolkit that I've been putting together through the support of the Wallace Center and then I'm going to talk a little bit about standard operating practices because even if in your hub you're not ready to go for a third party audit, standard operating procedures are a great thing to start thinking about. So, I wanted to start off with a quote that I found on the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Services website about food hubs which says, "By offering a combination of production, aggregation, distribution and marketing services, food hubs make it possible for producers to gain entry into new and additional markets that would be difficult or impossible to access to their own." And I



found this quote and I really liked it because I think that getting a third party certification really allows food hubs to do exactly this which is get farmers access to a market they wouldn't have otherwise. So, this is one of the main reasons that the food safety audit has been so great for us. So, and again, this is expanding markets for hubs and local farms. So one of the things through our experience with the audit was that we found that food safety certifications provide an opportunity for us to open up new marketplaces for our farmers through sales to institutions. So institutions being schools, hospitals, government or state agencies, universities or other workplaces that might require a third party certification. It provides potential to move a large volume of products and depending on how big the volume is might provide an opportunity to do preplanning with the farmers that you work with which can be a great benefit. And then one of the other things that a food safety audit does in my opinion, which I'll be talking about, a bit is it provides an opportunity for you to upgrade your facility with best practices regarding food safety and if we think about the Food Safety Modernization Act or FSMA that's coming up starting to get your hub in operation up to best practices is a great thing to do.

So, again I'm from Farm Fresh Rhode Island. I built a little bit of an introduction, but again we're a 501(c)(3). We were founded in 2004. Our mission is to grow a local food system that values the environment, health, and quality of life and farmers and eaters. We run a lot of different programs. We talk about our programs under two broad umbrellas. One is our Committee Access Programs, which involve farmer's markets, nutrition education, nutrition incentive programs and the other side is our Enterprise Programs, which includes Market Mobile and Veggie Box, which I'll talk about in a moment. But so we do a lot of different programs and we like to combine them and use our programs as best as possible to help serve local farmers and to serve eaters all around the state. So again, we run two main distribution programs. The first is called Market Mobile. Through Market Mobile we work with about 70 farmers and food producers from around Rhode Island, Mass, and Connecticut. We at Rhode Island are the smallest state, so we like to talk about local as southern New England and we also talk a lot about regional being the entire northeast. We work with about 200 different customers around primarily Rhode Island and the Boston area.

We're pretty lucky in that we have a lot of large urban areas within a short distance from our operation, so we have dense urban areas right around us, which is very helpful. So in our program, farmers set their own prices. We have an online ordering system. Farm name is preserved throughout the supply chain, so farm name is on the order form, it's on the invoice, it's on the packaging that transparency is very important to us and in our operation. In our operation, 18% of sales go to support the delivery and aggregation, so farmers build that 18% into their prices. Again, we have an online ordering system. It's a custom-built software platform and as of August of 2014 we have our USDA Good Handling Practice or GHP certification. And so this is a picture of our warehouse from a couple of years ago when we had lots of food. This is in our 55 cooler, so. We hold very little inventory in this program so all the



food comes in and then goes out the next day and you can see we have tags, you can see where it might say Wishing Stone, we have tags for all of our farmers. We store everything in our warehouse by farm; makes a little different than other warehouses. So our second program is the Veggie Box Program and this is our Work State Wellness Program. It's also sometimes we call it a Multi-farm CSA. So again, we work with about 25 farmers from Rhode Island and Massachusetts and we deliver to about 80 worksites, YMCAs and other community centers around town. The program runs year round with weekly boxes from June through December and a biweekly option from January through June. We actually sent out boxes this morning. So we usually over the course of the year work with about 1500 different families from all around Rhode Island.

Through our surveys we found that many of the folks who participate in this program had had little interaction with the local food system before, so we find this to be a really important program for introducing you Rhode Islanders to local farms and local food and the local food system. Our boxes cost 25 dollars a week and they are packed in a bushel box and we send out an E-newsletter full of recipes, information about the farm, storage information, a lot of great information to help people eat more fruits and vegetables and that program has been around since about 2011. So looking at our hub's development, I pulled out a couple of key timeline pieces. So in 2009 we started our distribution program and our distribution programs really started because we had farms and chefs that we were working with coming to us and saying, "There's got to be an easier way for us to be able to connect and work together." So our answer was to see what we could do about that which was starting to build our hub and so that started in 2011, or sorry 2009. In 2011, we made our first cooler expansion and we hit 1 million in sales, which was a very exciting milestone for us. In 2013, we had our second cooler expansion so it's always interesting when you build a cooler and you think it's going to last for a certain amount of time and then you sometimes grow faster than you think, so we expanded our coolers in 2013 through the help of a loan. And then in 2014, we got our Good Handling Practices or GHP certification through the USDA.

We also became a Chartwells Approved Vendor and we also hit 2.1 million in sales for 2013 and we're aiming for 2.35 million for 2015 and you can see a picture over there on the left it shows a little bit of our growth trajectory over the last couple of years, so green is 2014. And if anyone has questions while we're going we'll leave time at the end, but if anyone has any questions please let know. So our experience again with the third party certification was really positive. It opened up new market channels for us. We actually started the process because we were approached by Chartwells' University Division who was interested in purchasing through us for their universities in the Boston area. And many of the farmers in our area were already GAP certified. So it's really important if you have a third party, food safety certification that you vendors are as well. We're really lucky in Rhode Island that we have a state run GAP Program, so our Cooperative Extension Programs help farmers get ready and achieve GAP



certification, so that may be different area and I know that a couple of folks have been working on group GAP Projects, but so that was something that was a big benefit to us. We really feel that the process allowed us to professionalize our operation and refine our policies and procedures. We had a number of new staff on the team last year, so it was really a great opportunity too for our new staff and our existing staff to learn and make our operation better and really be clear about the best way to do everything and keeping food safety as a top priority. Definitely want to give a shout out to Cherry Capital Foods in Michigan who provided a lot of support through sharing documents and some other tracking materials, so it was a huge help to have Cherry Capital helps us in this project. And again, most of the things that we did in audit, felt like things that we should be doing anyways. So I wanted to introduce the audit.

So again, we did a USDA's GHP or Good Handling Practice Audit. The GHP audit is in the family of other audits including the GAP, the Good Agricultural Practices and the Good Manufacturing or the GMP program. So GAP is for the farms who are your suppliers and then the GMP would be for people who are working in a kitchen making value-added products. The Good Handling Practice is the audit specifically for food handlers, for food hubs, anyone who is distributing food. And so there are a number of other third party audit systems that include Primus, AIB, SQF, and GFSI so there are quite a number of other systems out there. So depending on what you're looking for when you're looking at your third party certification, depending on if you're approached by a customer, it's definitely important to know which audit you're going to look for and what the positives or the opportunities and challenges with the different audits. But we felt like the GAP audit or the Good Handling Practice Audit was the best one for us because many of our farms were GAP certified and it felt like the right fit for us. So to overview a little bit of what is covered in the Good Handling Practice or the GHP audit; it focuses on a number of key areas which include worker health and hygiene, food safety measures that include recalls, returns, allergens and contamination. It looks at the cleanliness of packing materials, your equipment, the entirety of your facility, the trucks both the cleanliness of the incoming trucks to your facility and the outgoing trucks. It looks at pest control measurements. It looks at refrigeration and temperature control and monitoring. It has a big section on preventative food defense and security and then it also looks at potable water and ice use in the facility. So there's a lot of different pieces and but those are the main focus areas.

Before I move on, I don't have it in notes here but I wanted to mention that the GHP audit is a point system. You need an 80% to pass. Each item on the GHP audit is a 5, 10, or 15 points. So you only need an 80 to pass which is great, although depending on who a potential vendor, who is looking to add you as a vendor they may be looking for a score higher than 80. So in terms of looking at costs, there are a number of costs associated with the audit that you might want to consider before you take on such a process, and those would include the personnel time needed to lead the process and upgrade the facility and I'll have a little bit more notes



later about what our costs were and who was involved in the process. There may be facility or equipment upgrades depending on what your current operation looks like. There is a lot of maintenance of records, documentations, cooler temperatures and also cleaning and sanitation of your facility, so there is ongoing maintenance needs associated with maintaining your audit once you pass. And then the other cost is the auditor's time at your facility and the travel time to reach you, so you're responsible for paying for your auditor's travel from their office to your facility. So this can really vary. We had a, luckily our auditor was not very far away from us and the audit went really quick, so our total time was about 2 hours whereas I've heard other people who've had up to 6 hours of auditor's time to pay for. So that can definitely be a big change in the total expense for your audit. So in terms of those might be the financial costs, in terms of the other human resource cost, there is definitely a large personnel requirement to prepare and organize the facility. So depending on where your hub is in its development and what your staff looks like, you're definitely going to need a main person in charge of organizing, preparing and maintaining an audit.

So there's again, there's ongoing documentation and maintenance that's required which includes, you know, daily temperature logs, monitoring temperatures of incoming produce or dairy items, there is ongoing cleaning and other maintenance, again, I feel like many of these were things that we should have been doing anyways. Some of them we already doing, but so there is definitely personnel required for ongoing maintenance. And one of the things that's also really helpful when you're going through the process is a clear understanding of why you're working on this process. So for us, again, a customer had approached us about becoming a supplier for them, so it was very clear to us why we were going through this process and that was really helpful for understanding all of the small challenges that we came across along the way. So we knew that by getting the certification we would open up, you know, hopefully tens of thousands of new dollars in sales for our farmers, so it definitely made all the work that went into it very manageable. So there is quite a lot of required documentation. So you can see here I have a couple pictures of all of the logs and binders that we use in our facility. So you are required to have a documented Food Safety Program. You're required to have documented employee training, as well as, notification that all of your employees have received that training. We have, need to document all of the equipment cleaning and sanitation that takes place and then we also document our pest control measures. We have a third party pest control company that comes in and provides services and then we also do daily monitoring of our cooler temperatures and then we also log the cooler temperatures of our trucks that go out on the road. So those are the required documentations.

There is also a number of required policies that you're required to show for your facility. You're required to have a Health and Hygiene Program for your staff. You're required to have a policy regarding your truck transit temperatures. So what happens if your temperatures go above the



required, above the approved temperatures. There are policies that are needed to be in place for rejection and disposal of produce or other products and then specific policies about repackaging, so you, depending on your operation you may or may not repack any produce. We repack produce through our Veggie Box Program and so that's the program in which we take any large volumes of produce and then create individual size boxes, so that's where we have packaging but depending on your operation you may or not be doing that so that series of questions may not apply to you. So a little look at our; oh I see a question about meat and seafood. So we are only at this time we only handle frozen meat. We are approved for fresh meat, but we only do frozen at this time. The farmers in Rhode Island who have USDA processed meat are only allowed to sell if frozen. So we do have policies regarding the temperature frozen meat has to come in and how it gets stored in the coolers and how it gets transported on the trucks. We're working on seafood. For seafood we have to have our HACCP certification, which we're working on a few more facility and equipment pieces to get that in place, but definitely there are different practices, and policies that are related to meat and seafood.

So we'll be exploring more fresh meat and seafood in the upcoming year or two, so I'll hopefully have more information at that time but we primarily handle fresh fruits and vegetables. We have eggs, dairy, cheese, yogurt, and then a lot of other value-added products that are shelf-stable. So this is a look at some of our costs. I thought that it might be helpful to see what it looked like from our end. So the whole process took us about five months. We started in May and finished in August. That also is the busiest time of year for us. The height of our season runs from July through September, so I think this would be a much faster process had it happened in the winter in the slower time for us, so I don't think it necessarily has to be a five month process. So, it took about 60 hours of my time. I'm the program director. Hopefully with the toolkit that we're putting together it might be a lot less for you facility. Our warehouse manager and our receiving operations manager were involved in the process for about 20 hours of time regarding warehouse improvements, policy reviews; we did a lot of moving and shifting things around in our facility. We also had about 40 hours of time from our various warehouse staff in terms of cleaning and preparation for the audit so that was in the few weeks ahead of the audit. And then our audit cost us about 250 dollars. It's 100 dollars an hour for the auditor's time and then a 50-dollar processing fee.

So again, we've heard from other peers of ours that, you know, they were required to pay for 6 hours of auditor's time, so we were lucky both in the travel time and the time that it took at our facility. We also if you saw the pictures from a few slides ago we had many binders that had all of our information right in one place and that made it a lot easier to for the auditor to have all the information. So preparation really does pay off in this whole process. So those were our setup costs for the audit. We continue to have ongoing audit costs that are involved in maintaining our audit. Auditors say that they may come up to three times a year for



unannounced visits. The audit also lasts one year and has to be renewed on a regular basis. So we pay about 50 dollars a month for our pest control services. We have a yearly cooler maintenance contract with our cooler purveyor. We'll be looking at recertification this summer which depending on the amount of time, we're estimating at somewhere between 250 and 500 dollars. We have our warehouse staff spend somewhere between 15 to 20 hours a month, I meant to say month there, but it seems to I left that out; 15 to 20 hours a month doing ongoing maintenance and implementation-related specifically to our Good Handling Practice Audit. And then another cost that may come up is traceability. We have traceability built into our current system, but if you don't have that current traceability system then may just be an additional expense related to your facility. So, I wanted to mention a little bit about the toolkit that I'm in the process of developing. So we again finished our audit in 2014 in August and we're talking to a number of folks and we have been asked to put together a toolkit to talk about this process and hopefully make it clear and easy for other hubs to do as well. So again, this is funded by the Wallace Center and I see Jeff Farman [assumed spelling] is on the webinar today, so I just want to give him a shout out and thank him for all of his help, all of his help with this process. So again, we're working on, I'm working on putting together a toolkit that describes all the different pieces of this. We hope to have it available in the summer of 2015 and so the toolkit is going to contain a lot of different pieces including an overview of the audit. It's going to include task lists and checklists, so the audit itself is about 30 pages.

There's also a user guide and instruction and policy manual. The user guide is about 40 pages. The instruction and policy guide is about 120 pages, so this is going to condense everything into the very clear things in terms of what exactly needs to be done. So there's a task list and a checklist. One of the things that I constantly did while we were preparing for our audit was looking at it, outlined everything we needed to do to check off, okay do I have things such as you know I have my documented food safety policy in place, I have you know implemented a hygiene program in my facility, I have you know made sure that all of my storage areas are protected from contaminants, so really making clear and concise lists of all of the tasks that need to be done and you can use that as a way to say, you know what is left to be done in our facility and then, as well as, you know what else do we have to go, how ready are we for our audit? So we'll also have some other guides in there and appendices including a short list of all the equipment and facility needs, examples of the tracking documents that you might need to have for your cooler or for your trucks. And then we'll also have a copy of our standard operating procedure document which Sherry [inaudible] helped us tremendously by sharing their SOP with us. So we'll be adjusting our, we'll be continuing to edit and share our standard operating procedure document and definitely giving a shout out to Cherry Capital for all the pieces that were originally theirs.

So I definitely want to ask for feedback around what would be helpful for your hub or if you're thinking about putting, getting ready for an audit what would you be interested; I am really



interested in making this as useful a document as possible, so definitely I'm interested in feedback about what you would like to see in such a guide. So, I wanted to move on to talk a little bit more about standard operating procedures. Before I do that I wondered if anyone has any other questions about what we've gone over so far? We'll leave time at the end as well, but I just wanted to pause for a moment. Yes. So the question was what scope of the GHP did we get audited for? So, the GHP consists of four sections. There's the general section. There is a part four storage and transportation. There is part six, wholesale distribution center and terminal warehouse and part seven which is preventative food defense. I'm not sure why, but there's no part five.

So again, it's the general the part four, part six and part seven. And part one through three is for the GAP, the farm-specific audit, but so we did general four, six and seven and those are the areas that the task lists and checklists are focused on. Part five is traceability rolled into general grade. Cost of the toolkit; you know, I might hand that one over Jeff Farman to ask what the distribution mechanism and cost for that toolkit is going to be. Great. It's going to be free, wonderful! Just wanted to make sure. So we'll be able to make that available to everyone which is exciting. Great. So moving on to Standard Operating Procedures, sorry Standard Operating Procedures or SOPs. So these are an important part of the GHP audit, but they're also incredibly helpful for your facility even if you're not doing an audit. So Standard Operating Procedures or SOPs are used to establish set method or approaches to tasks. I recommend that they are written down, that they're dated and stored in place that's easily accessible to staff. I had a joke amongst a couple of my colleagues around dating policies and the importance of making sure you write the date on that policy so that you can say, "Okay, we need this is in 2014 so if you go back to review 2015 or 2016 you know when that policy started." It sounds really basic, but it's really easy not to put the date on your policies. I was joking about this with a couple of other colleagues about the importance of dating your policies and one of my colleagues thought that I was mentioning dating as in romantically dating your policy and I actually thought that there was something really interesting about that idea of once you write up a policy, making sure that it works and you know "dating" you policies and making sure that they actually work for your operation and continuing to refine them until they actually work. So, you should both write the date and date your policies is my recommendation.

We hope, I see a question. Yes, we hope to review our policies on a yearly basis. I think that's a really great practice to review them every year. Depending on what your operations look like, I know ours is constantly growing and changing and so making sure that our policies are up-to-date and our training is up-to-date is really important. So, there should definitely be training for your staff, and if possible, staff should be given a lot of input in their creation. So depending on the structure of your facility and what your warehouse looks like and how you run your operation, people who are running those operations should be, play a big role in putting them together. So that's one piece of advice. You don't want to create standard operating



procedures that are not realistic and that staff is not able or willing to carry out. So we have found, let's see the next slide, yeah so we have gone through a lot of standard operating procedure review and creation in the past year. And it's been a great project both for our some of our staff who are new and staff who have been there to have that agency to develop the standard operating procedures and really look and refine what is happening in our warehouse. So I wanted to put the slide about when and where to use standard operating procedures; they're really helpful to use as training pieces or refreshers. Standard operating procedures are great for orientation and hiring. They're great for new drivers, new warehouse folks and also new folks in your administrative team or in your office. They're really helpful when you're making an upgrade to your facility. So I know for us when one of the big things we upgraded our facility to was to comply with the GHP audit was we created a very distinct separate staff break area where that was the only area that folks were allowed to eat and drink in and so we definitely had a training around our new standard operating procedures around this is where, you know, you go to leave all your food and it's where you leave your bags and so when we made that facility upgrade that was a great time to develop a standard operating procedure and share it with staff. Any other time you make operational changes, another great time to do SOPs and then I outlined a couple other specific areas that I think SOPs are very helpful. So again, some of these are foods safety-related, but some of them aren't. So that's receiving, your receiving practices, what your pack line looks like, how you do distribution, payables and receivables also a really great place to have standard operating procedures; anything involving staff training and also customer service. So in terms of aligning what your operation looks like as your operation continues to grow, making sure that you're doing things in a consistent and meaningful way that's in alignment with all of your values it's just really great to start writing things down. So we, I know we've gotten to the point where we have many different people working on our team. We have about six fulltime people who work on the Market Mobile and Veggie Box Programs, so you know, a couple years ago it was maybe one or two, so when you have six people it's really helpful to have everyone on the same page in agreed upon ways that this is the best way we do receiving or customer service or other different aspects of our operation.

Yes, we definitely have SOPs on cleaning and sanitizing, definitely. So yes and some of these are the non-food safety-related ones, but definitely in terms of what is your cleaning look like? What is sanitation? What is your policy on pallets or other packing materials in your facility, but there are many different places to use SOPs. The joke is it's the SOPs spring around our facility where just everything we're making SOPs for. So I have a couple examples now of some of the SOPs that we've been working on in our facility. Our receiving operations manager has been developing a lot of different SOPs, so I thought I'd share some of those. And so this is an SOP clip from our pack line and what our pack line looks like and how it runs. So here we talk about we have different roles on the pack line and what each person's responsibilities are. We have definitions. So we're continuing to define this and then we're going to do a staff-wide



training with everyone who works on the pack line to go over, okay here's the different roles, this is what they're called, this is what the person does, this is how it functions. So I'll leave this up here for a moment in case anyone wants to see. So this is our second SOP that I'm going to share. So this is the SOP that our receiving operations manager has been working on as well for what checking looks like for our drivers. So we have about nine different folks who work are either our drivers or assistants who work on our trucks and we're continuing reworking on how to make the check-in process standard, how to make sure everything is noted and everything is documented so in case there's any problems when they get back to the office it's really clear and we know how to handle everything that came in. So we did, we try to do monthly or every other month driver meetings and then our past driver meeting in January we went over and did a retraining with all of our drivers on this standard operating procedure for check-in and so this is now, so we did a training on it, it's printed out in every driver folder and this will be something we'll be revisiting. So this has our summary of what the assistant's role is. We have the check-in and notation for everyone. So we have things like here's how to write when things are missing or broken, here's what to do if the numbers aren't correct. I'll wait for the comment that's coming in. And then one more standard operating procedure to share. This one has a bunch of pictures. This is from our receiving standard operating procedure, which demonstrates how to best pack everything in our facility. So we have information about what not to do, what to do, what is the best way to store everything so it is, uses spaces as wisely as possible and it's easy for our pack line to find the next day.

So question around traceability; so we use custom software that we call Market Mobile that was built for our operation. So traceability is a 100% built into that, so again, farms list by, the farm lists everything and so our product you don't buy carrots, you buy Shartner's Farm's carrots, you buy Foretown Farm's carrots. So traceability is a 100% tied into that so everything is constantly, the farm name and the product are always tied together so that provides the traceability throughout the entire system. So I'd be curious to hear what other people use. I'm not as familiar with other people's operations or systems and how they're traceability functions. But it's very easy for us to do a recall, because we can say, okay, if something happened let's say with the yogurt from one of our dairy producers we know, okay we had 10 of those yogurts come in from this producer and they went to these customers so it makes it really easy for us to identify the product that came in and where it possibly went. So, I wanted to pose a number of questions to all of you to think about your operation in terms of what preparation level; where you are right now and whether or not a food audit would be right for you, if the GHP is the right fit. So my questions, I can read through the questions here, but looking at do you have farms that are GAP certified or are the farms around you able to get that certification? Are you interested in growing your operation? We have always been very interested in continuing to grow and serve the farmers in our area, so expanding our ability to serve large customers was definitely in our growth plan and so this made a lot of sense to us. We also did have the capacity to expand our operation, so I'd ask you to ask the same whether or not



you're interested in expanding, looking at what staff capacity you have to prepare for that audit and maintain that audit as well. And so that is the extent of my presentation. This is my contact number information I'll go back to that in a minute, but I guess I wanted to open it up for questions at this point. Good question about organic farms that agree to do GAP. So we have very few organic farms in Rhode Island actually. Most of the farms, organic certified farms in Rhode Island sell directly to farmers markets and so not as many of them are GAP certified. We probably have two or three organic GAP certified farms. Again, so many of our farms sell directly to customers and so they're not always as interested in GAP certification, I'm sorry, inorganic certification because they often say you know "My customers know me and they know my growing practices, so I don't need to get GAP certified. I just call myself chemical free." So that's our experience but I do know a number of organic GAP certified farms. You guys are mentioning the challenge for you guys, yeah. I mean for us at least, we have such strong retail markets that it's not as many farmers in our area are interested in doing wholesale so we're constantly looking at how can we make wholesale work for farmers in our area and so that wholesale can be a good option in addition to retail. So we have about 55 farmers markets in our state and we are pretty small here in Rhode Island, so a lot of farmers markets but we're continuing to look at expanding wholesale. No, we do not require farms that we work with to be GAP certified. We have a filter on our website for on our ordering form for our customers who require all the farms to be GAP certified. So only GAP certified farms will show up on institutional customer's order form. Our certification does not cover the farms that are not GAP certified.

I believe that it's slightly different with GMP depending on if you're doing manufacturing. Depending on what manufacturing process you're doing, your GMP practice may cover a farm who's not GAP because of various critical control points or various processing, but GHP does not extend to, my understanding, is it doesn't extend to the farms so those farms would need to be GAP certified. We have demand from customers first. So again, we were approached by Chartwells which is a Food Service Management company. They're part of Compass and so it may run a number of universities and colleges around the university area. So they approached us and that's kind of what got us started and now that we have a GHP certification we can look out and talk to other customers and we can use it in outreach material. But again, for us the demand from customers that we started with was really helpful for us to decide to pursue this because we had a large customer who was like, "We want to buy from you, you need to do this." So it was very clear to us. But again, I just want to throw in there with FSMA coming on, the Food Safety Modernization Act there's a lot of things in here that might be good to think about anyways. I'm not, I'm certainly not an expert on the FSMA program and I don't know if anyone else here is, but a lot of these things are good things to be thinking about anyways. Yeah, and to continue on that, I really just felt like there was almost nothing in this process that was felt extraneous or things that we shouldn't be doing. So they really all just felt like, I kept joking that our operation was, I felt like our operation was going to college and so this was like



a really good growth experience for our program and our team. Correct. Yes, so there are specific aspects of the GHP audit that ask about potential contamination between GAP certified and non-GAP certified farms. So you're definitely not supposed to mix them so we don't, none of our products get mixed in our Market Mobile Program. It's only in our Veggie Box Program that we mix product. So as long as, you know, products are isolated and are not combined then and that those products, you know, aren't touching and those sort of things then non-GAP and GAP certified produce can be in the same place is my understanding. And yes, so we do have different cooler temperatures so we have four different temperature storage areas. We have one cooler, actually two coolers that are 36 degrees. We have one 36 degree dairy cooler that holds all of our dairy and eggs. We have another large 36 degree cooler that handles all of produce that needs to be stored at 36 degrees. We have one 55 degree cooler and we also have a freezer that is definitely 0 degrees. It's very cold in there and then we also have room temperature storage and so, again, one of the things about our operation is that food comes in and leaves within 24 to 48 hours, sometimes even 12 hours. So we're not storing food at 55 degrees for two weeks. It's again, usually only there between 12 and 48 hours. So then again, so we have a 36 degree, a 55, a freezer at 0 degrees and room temperature. And so we have temperature monitoring for all of our coolers. So we have records for the freezer, the 36 degree and the 55 degree room. Do we offer certification assistance for non-GAP certified farmers?

We actually are looking to provide some certification for, sorry, to provide some assistance for our non-GAP certified farmers. Again, our cooperative extensions at our University of Rhode Island does provide a lot of assistance, but we're going to be in the upcoming year looking at providing assistance to some of our other farms that are not GAP certified. We've been talking to a number of farmers who are not GAP certified about their interests in obtaining that certification. A lot of them are interested but some aren't. Again, because we had so many that are mainly selling to retail, they don't really, they're not as interested in it, so but we do hope to be able to provide more assistance to people who maybe interested. We do temp a number of products that come into us. We have a number of temp funds so they're these little handheld temperature monitoring devices. So we monitor the temperature of all of the eggs and the dairy that comes into us, as well as, the meat. So we require that farms bring in, you know, dairy and eggs at specific temperatures or below. So at this time, we haven't been doing as much temps of produce. Yes, we do capture those temperatures on the receiving logs. So we record on our producer pages, we call them our Producer Pages which checks in everything that should be coming in. We record the temperature and the expiration date and we have records of all of that. And so again, we keep records of all of our producer check-in pages and those all get logged, so if there ever were to be an issue or a recall or if our auditor ever wanted to see them we have all of those available. Our 2009 startup funding; we had a combination of funding both state federal and grant funding that got our program up and running.



And so we had funding from our state Department of, sorry, our Division of Agriculture. We also I believe had some specialty crop block grants and then had some other private funding I believe. So it was a combination of different funding that got us started. Oh good question about on farm visits to observe practices of our producers; yes we have just started in the past year-and-a-half. We are doing farm visits. We, again, we run a number of different programs so our, three of our programs are combined forces to do farm visits of all of our producers. So we are doing a number of visits. We had one a couple weeks ago and we have couple scheduled for the next couple of weeks, but we will be doing a number of visits to all of our producers. We hope to get to everyone within a couple of years span, both looking at that they're growing everything that they're saying they're growing and that they are following various practices. They are planned and we do our farm visits with a council of farm advisers. So we go to the farms both with our program staff and with a number of other farmers who help us to understand what's happening at the farm. Most of our staff are not farmers and so having the advisory of other farmers is very helpful for us to make sure that we're not missing anything that's non-farmers might not see. And because of the coordination of multiple people at the visit, we are doing planned visits. And if Evette if you can tell me which response that you would like me to repeat. I'm not sure which, oh if it was about the funding.

Oh yeah, so we had state funding, we had federal and then we also had some private foundation grants. So it was a combination of different funding that helped us start up in 2009. Okay, great question about user complaints handled, do we accept responsibility and then investigate or is it passed on to producers? So in our operation we don't hold titles so the farmer owns it along with the entire process chain. Veggie Box is a little bit different. We do take ownership over that product. So we, different user complaints are handled differently so if it's a quality complaint that usually goes back to the farmer. So if a customer is unhappy with, you know, if the broccoli is yellow or you know other quality of greens or something else is subpar, then that goes back to the farmer. We try to do as much quality checks of the product when it comes in. You know, occasionally if there is a complaint about something is broken or dropped or crushed depending on we'll look at if that happened you know on our truck or our pack line and then that would be our responsibility. So we definitely, that's actually a really good place to use a standard operating procedure. We have some but it's not fully written out but that would definitely be a great place to say, if this is the complaint this, you know, here's like let's say five different general types of complaints and here's how you would handle each of them and that's really good information to give to our drivers. Our drivers generally know what complaints they need to call the office about or what complaints they can handle by themselves on the road. Interesting question about do we choose not to do business with some producers and consumers? Occasionally we've had issues with producers that have made us discontinue working with them and the same with consumers, but I think we do our best to try to please everyone but some folks just aren't a great fit either as a producer or a vendor. So, you know, our operation is a little different. We have two ordering days and two



delivery days at this point; you order on Monday, you receive food on Thursday, you know, that's not a system that works everyone. There's a lot of customers who are used to produce delivery services that you know you order one day and you get it within 24 hours; that's just not the way our operation works because everything is special, specially harvested from the farms for those orders so some customers are just not interested in working with us for that reason.

We're definitely looking at how do we continue to expand our delivery capacity and deliver more days, but you know, we're not able to meet everyone's demands in terms of delivery and, order and delivery time for those sort of turnarounds. And you know we're always looking for high-quality produce from our farmers that's packed in a certain way, you know, that's you know, we're trying to help farms you know improve their packaging and their labels and all of those sort of things so that they have an end product that is high-quality and standard size. That's actually a good point if you think about if there's potential institutional customers who are looking to work with you, you know, when we approached by Chartwells we made very clear this is what our operation looks like. We're not going to be able to move over to an inventory system at this time to serve your customers, so I would definitely recommend you know if you are approached by a potential institutional customer about working with them that you have a conversation about what your delivery practices look like and whether those are a good fit for the institution. Responding to Vicki's question, yes so in our program farmers are responsible for labeling and packing all of their products, so a lot of them do their own boxing. Depending on the size, you know, we don't require 100% standard sizes in terms of 1/2 bushel-bushel. A lot of our farmers pack in 5 pound units or 8 ounces or whatever standard size that they would like to set. We usually try to give some feedback and advice to farmers and say, you know, list and quantities that fit your packing. So our warehouse staff definitely provides a lot of feedback and training for our farms, particularly new small farms that we work with about how to best pack the produce.

We're always talking to farmers about, "We want to make sure your product gets to the customer in the best, you know, exactly like you gave it to us." So trying to help our farmers package their product in a way that keeps the product safe and has all the information about the farm and the farm name and the unit name is really important both for making sure that product gets to the customer on time, but you know our customers have really told us we want to see the farm name on the box in our cooler. You know, we want our staff to go into the cooler and say, "This is Foretown's carrots, these are Confreda's, this is Confreda's corn", so we really try to make sure that all of our packaging is great as possible. At this point we don't charge for any of those services relating to helping producers package, marketing or do GAP. That's kind of all wrapped up into the services that we provide in terms of the aggregation and distribution. So a lot of those conversations around packaging and marketing are done kind of in the context of delivery or following up with issues. So in the upcoming year we'll be doing some more and different work with farmers around some of those issues, so but I'm pretty sure



that will continue to be done at free of charge. But it is in an interesting thought to think about whether or not, you know, you can develop expertise and whether or not that could be an income potential. I don't know of any examples of that at this time. I'm just waiting for the next questions to come in. You know, I don't have the information right off the top of my head about the three areas of the grants. I could potentially get that information for you, but I don't at the moment have the answers to those questions about how much funding we had. I feel like the Wallace Center might have some of that information in some of our reports.

Okay, great question; Vicki asked about revenue between the two programs, Market Mobile versus Veggie Box. So they're pretty different programs in which one is a wholesale program and one is a direct to consumer program. So Market Mobile is 18% is the fee that gets added on to that program. We have a couple additional other fees such as like below minimum and a couple of other things but so we did 2.1 million in sales last year and 18% of that goes to cover our costs. So we're constantly looking at how we can help farmers sell more food and how we can control our costs so that, you know, we work on pretty small margins there. I don't know what other hubs do in terms of, I mean you do in terms of your margins, but the 18% is ours. The Veggie Box Program our boxes cost 25 dollars and we put about 15 dollars-worth of food in the box. So we have about a 40% margin there. There's a lot more administrative costs associated with the Veggie Box Program in terms of the just the customer service requirements and all of the other pieces that are involved in supporting the Veggie Box Program.

So following up to Noel's question, so our Veggie Box Program we moved in the last year over to an ongoing subscription model, so it's different from a CSA where you have to sign up for a set block of time. We used to use a session model, but now people are signed up until they decide to leave. So people can join for one week, they can join for the entire year, so they, so it's not a week, they can purchase to week-to-week but you're signed up until you decide to leave. So we used to have our program modeled on the you have to contact us if you want to sign up for the next session but now you have to contact us if you want to end your participation with the program. And one of the things that has helped us do is collect more information from our participants about why they're leaving and ways that we can improve the program. So we have found by switching from the session model to the ongoing subscription model we have people stay with us a lot longer than they did the previous year.

So Jill's asking if our numbers are set or do they fluctuate from week-to-week? They do fluctuate from week-to-week and month-to-month. They are on a monthly basis fairly steady, but because people can drop out you have to drop out Thursday before the box comes on Tuesday. So they do fluctuate, we do a lot of planning with our farmers ahead of time around specific quantities that we think we're going to need. So we have working agreements that with our farmers around those planning pieces that have an agreement that say, you know we



agreed to buy this from you but we both understand that, you know, this may not come in due to agriculture and you need to, and for them the farmers to understand that we think these are going to be your numbers but they might not. So some of our numbers came in a lot less than we thought last year so we did our best to help farmers move that product in other places. So we're doing less, we're doing less and different types of planning this year to try to avoid having farmers grow too much. So then the second question, the second part of Jill's question is about do they deliver set units or do we purchase in bulk and repackage it? It really depends. It really depends on the product and on the farms. You know, some farms can really easily put carrots in a bag for us. Some farms that labor cost is way too high and that would make the product too costly for us and it just doesn't make sense. So we have a pretty extensive pack line setup and so we are pretty good at packing things, but it really depends on the item. So, you know, we try to find items you can okay, you know, instead of doing a bag of apples we can do you know we'll have about five apples per box or you know it's really easy for us to weigh out carrots but it's really hard for us to weigh out something else. So it definitely depends on the product. I'm just going to switch over to my contact information page

Okay, so wait for another question to come in here. Oh great. Thank you I'm very glad Tom that it has been informative. If anyone has any other thoughts about other things that they'd like to see in the toolkit, anything else that I didn't mention or specific things that you think would be helpful when thinking about your operation, please let me know. I'd like to, you know, we had a very positive experience with the GHP audit and so I hope that we can help to make it an easy process for anyone else who's interested in doing this for your operation, and again, even if you're not seeking to get third party certification there's a lot of really great things in the audit that are very helpful to be thinking about, so.

Noel: Alright, well thank you so much Hannah. Had a little feedback but I think we're good now. That was a really great presentation and I think everybody really appreciated that you really drilled down on some of the specifics and really outlined your journey at Farm Fresh Rhode Island as you guys deal with these things. So thank you again and we will hopefully get you out here to Michigan at some point. And thank you everybody for your questions. I think I do see just one more question if you want to plug back in for just a second Hannah and; sure maybe Jeff can answer this.

Mellion: Yeah I would say I'm, we'll talk to Jeff about if it's, oh it doesn't look like Jeff is still on but I think probably the Wallace Center will be releasing that information and then I can also when that toolkit is done I can share it with Noel to make sure that it is passed along to the Michigan Food Hub Network and I'm glad, as Noel said, you liked about drilling down to all the details. There's so many details that are very specifically lined out in the audit task list. There's



so much about the whole GHP process that is very detail-specific, so there's much more of that coming and I'm so glad that everyone appreciated the presentation and found it helpful, you know, it's really wonderful to be able to share this work with folks and that to be able to take the things that we learn and share them with other people, so thank you for letting me share this journey we've been on.

