

On-farm Record Keeping: If You Don't Write It Down, It Didn't Happen



Many growers already are following good agricultural practices and good handling practices, but some of them fall short when it comes to documenting their activities.

When regulators and auditors come to inspect a farm, the first things they want to see are the records. A record is something that must be kept to show a process has been completed or an action was taken. It will verify your farm food safety policies and procedures are in place and that certain tasks have been completed throughout the year.

Even if you follow best practices, if you do not write it down, auditors and inspectors will assume things that aren't written down didn't happen. Record keeping also will help you keep track of your spending, sales and profits from your farm, which will help you when you prepare your income tax return.

The basis of record keeping

- **Who:** A person must be assigned to handle the record keeping and work with the auditors. In a family owned and operated farm, or a farm operated by a couple, one of the family members can be the person in charge of keeping records. Record the names of the people involved in any activities that are directly or indirectly related to your farming operations. If possible, obtain the person's signature. Examples of activities that should be recorded include crop maintenance operations, pesticides applications, harvests and worker training sessions. A daily record also should be kept of all visitors to the farm.
- **What:** Record the basic information of the important activities performed on your farm that potentially could affect the quality and productivity of your crop. Record how the activities were performed? If any corrective actions were taken, how was those implemented? If crops were damaged due to animal intrusion, how were they separated from other harvested crops, and how you will measure or monitor the potential risk? Record any farming operations like irrigation, pesticide

spraying, fertilizer application, composting processes, harvesting and so forth. Some of the basic information that should be documented includes:

- Field designation code or number for multiple fields
- Land use documentation for each season or year
- Pre-harvest checklists
- Names of workers attending training sessions and lists of training materials provided to them
- Water testing results and sample locations
- Activity logs, such as cleaning schedules
- Sanitizer types and concentrations used for water treatment



Keeping record of compost pile temperature

- Processes used to clean and sanitize harvesting containers and aids
 - Maintenance and restocking activity of field sanitation units
 - Any observed or reported illness or injury of workers
 - Composting processes, types of feedstock and date of application
 - Product names, names of chemical or pesticide applicators and the plot number where any materials were sprayed
 - Any corrective actions taken as a result of potential food safety hazards
- **When:** Record the date and time of all the activities at the time an event happens; when it is fresh in your mind. Do not wait a day or two to record the information. Set aside a specific day or time to work on record keeping.
 - **Where:** Record the name and/or location of the farm where activities were performed. If you have multiple farms, assign each farm a code or number and use this code or number to record where the activities were performed. If there are multiple plots on one farm, number each plot. Keeping records of harvesting dates and times, commodities, packing information and the buyers of crops harvested from a particular plot will help you keep track of the supply chain. If you confirm a food safety issue with a particular crop, you don't have to recall your entire product line from the market. You can track and recall the particular products that are questionable.

- **Why:** Keeping records of all farm activities will facilitate your ability to take corrective actions as a result of potential food safety hazards. Documentation of your farm activities is important if you are planning to get certification for following good agricultural practices and good handling practices. Just keeping proper paperwork can earn you as much as 65 to 85 percent of the points you need to pass a particular section of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's good agricultural practices and good handling practices audit.
- **How:** Each farm may have different record-keeping needs. Depending on the activities performed, different farms may be required to keep different information. The record-keeping system depends on the intended use of the records and the certification required by your retailer and supplier.

Overall, the records should provide accurate and necessary information, fit with farm organization and farming practices and help to locate your produce at least one step forward and one step backward. For small farms, record keeping by a traditional paper method may be convenient and economical. In other cases, electronic methods using software packages may be best.

Several record-keeping templates are available online from the LSU AgCenter. http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/food_health/food/safety/On-Farm+Food+Safety/Record+Keeping/OnFarm-Record-Keeping-Logs.htm. These templates reflect some of the activities that occur on a typical fruit and vegetable production operation, and all templates easily can be customized for the commodities you are producing and your farming practices.



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Authors

Achyut Adhikari, Ph.D., LSU AgCenter School of Nutrition and Food Sciences
 Charles Graham, Ph.D., LSU AgCenter Pecan Research-Extension Station
 Fatemeh Malekian, Ph.D., Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center
 Kathryn Fontenot, Ph.D., LSU AgCenter School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
 Melanie L. Lewis Ivey, Ph.D., LSU AgCenter Department of Plant Pathology and Crop Physiology

William B. Richardson, LSU Vice President for Agriculture
 Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
 Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station
 Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service
 LSU College of Agriculture

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