

Produce Safety

ALLIANCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRODUCE SAFETY ALLIANCE RECRUITS MEMBERS FOR WORKING COMMITTEES, LAUNCHES WEBSITE

GENEVA, NY (April 1, 2011)– The Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) today announced the official launch of its website (www.producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/) and issued a call for farmers, researchers, state officials, produce industry experts and others interested in produce safety to join an Alliance working committee. The committee members will assist in the development of a national Good Agricultural Practices (GAP’s) education curriculum focused on understanding and implementing fresh fruit and vegetable food safety practices.

The Alliance is a broad-based partnership charged with developing a national education and training program for farmers, packers, and regulatory personnel of fresh produce in anticipation of a new produce safety rule from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is housed at Cornell University’s National GAPs Program and is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the FDA.

The Alliance has created ten working committees, each focused on a specific aspect of produce safety, ranging from production and post-harvest handling issues related to risk assessment and preventive practices through food safety plan writing to certification-related activities.

“It is in our best interest to cast a wide net to encourage broad participation in order to obtain the best information, scientific knowledge, and in-the-field experience available to inform these efforts,” said Betsy Bihn, project director of the Alliance. “The website is one key information and outreach vehicle, but it is our intention to use various communications channels to inform and engage all interested stakeholders”.

“By collaborating with other experts in the field, the Alliance will review existing GAPs educational and instructional materials, seek to identify and fill any areas

where information is lacking, and then develop and continuously update multi-formatted education programs on food safety, as well as how to co-manage for food safety and environmental concerns.”

Working committees will select a chair that will then serve on a Steering Committee for the Alliance. The Alliance’s steering committee will play a leading role in bringing forward recommendations to the Alliance’s Executive Committee on curriculum content as well as what education and outreach materials will be most effective in assisting farmers and packers in establishing or upgrading food safety systems for their operations.

The Alliance is governed by an Executive Committee which includes members from Cornell University, the Association of Food and Drug Officials, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, the FDA, USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service, and USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Executive Committee is charged with ensuring that educational outreach materials will be used in an effective and efficient manner.

“There is no more fundamental function of government than protecting consumers from harm, which is why food safety is one of USDA’s top priorities,” said Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen A. Merrigan. “The Alliance will bring a wide range of voices to the table and use that information to develop a valuable curriculum for fresh fruit and vegetable food safety practices. I encourage all interested parties to assist in these efforts as we move forward.”

“The Alliance has set an ambitious agenda,” said Michael R. Taylor, the FDA’s Deputy Commissioner for Foods. “Tapping into the expertise and experience of farmers, researchers, and food safety professionals for these working committees will be key to its success.”

To ensure the widest possible level of participation each working committee will meet by teleconference on a regular basis as set by that working committee. Individuals interested in joining a PSA working committee can download a membership form from the Alliance website at <http://producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/working.html>. For those without computer access, they can request a membership form by calling 315 787 2625 or writing to Betsy Bihn, 630 W. North Street, Hedrick Hall-NYSAES, Geneva, NY 14456.

“We encourage all those with expertise and knowledge in the produce food safety area to come forward and assist in these efforts as it will lay the foundation for the Alliance’s GAPS Educational Materials Conference to be held in June in Orlando, FL,” said Bihn. “During the conference, the Alliance will review existing materials, determine where new or additional materials are needed, and begin developing those materials. We encourage participation in this process.”

To view a complete list of working committees and details on the scope of work of each committee, visit <http://producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/working.html>

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