

New Hampshire and Vermont Farmers Learn to Manage Food Safety and Agritourism Risks

Food safety is an issue that affects farmers across the world, so when Carole Soule, owner of a 36-acre cattle farm in New Hampshire, heard about an opportunity to interact with her fellow farmers and learn more about the subject, she jumped at the chance.

Having started her cattle farm in New Hampshire in 2002, Soule said that food safety is important to her business because “once it leaves the farmer’s hand, we have no more control over it, and yet we could be blamed for having a product that spoils. So those are issues that we need to be aware of.”

Food safety was not the only subject that Soule learned more about through her participation in an educational project titled “Food Safety Education and Planning for Agritourism Providers in Vermont and New Hampshire”. She also learned about agritourism, the practice of attracting visitors and travelers to agricultural areas, generally for educational and recreational purposes. Soule became familiar with resources that she had not previously known were available.

The project was directed by Ben Amsden, of the Plymouth State University Center for Rural Partnerships, and was funded by a grant from the Northeast Center for Risk Management Education. It provided education and assessment in the area of food safety that is essential for farmers who are planning to directly market food products in agritourism venues. Issues of food safety in agritourism contexts are complex enough to warrant specific educational resources, and Plymouth State created a program to help farmers navigate the risk management issues arising from food safety. Understanding and addressing the risk management implications of food safety will ensure that agritourism providers can economically and efficiently produce safe food, and continue to promote positive agricultural and rural experiences.

Soule explained that the session provided her with “information about food handling and how you market at the farmer’s markets and so forth. I learned more about how to handle food safely at the market and learned that selling frozen food at the farmers market is pretty much the way to go.” She said that she would recommend this risk management education programming to any farmer, especially since it is so critical to learn about food safety. “I would recommend it. I feel like it’s an issue that needs to be addressed for everybody, and I don’t think farmers are as aware of it as they should be. It’s an issue that needs careful attention.”

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EXTENSION RISK MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

“Helping America’s farmers and ranchers manage risk.”

The Extension Risk Management Education program provides training to help producers learn new strategies to manage complex and growing agricultural risks. Extension Risk Management Education accomplishes this by encouraging and funding innovative programs across the country, and helping programs focus on accomplishing tangible results.

Projects are producer-focused, results-based and encourage public-private partnerships. Funded projects must identify targeted results that will help producers manage risk and then describe how the project will measure those results.

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Section 524(a)(3) of the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 authorized the Partnerships for Risk Management Education and provided \$5 million dollars annually to be administered by USDA-NIFA. Extension Risk Management Education is delivered through four regional centers that provide grant funding and leadership within their regions.

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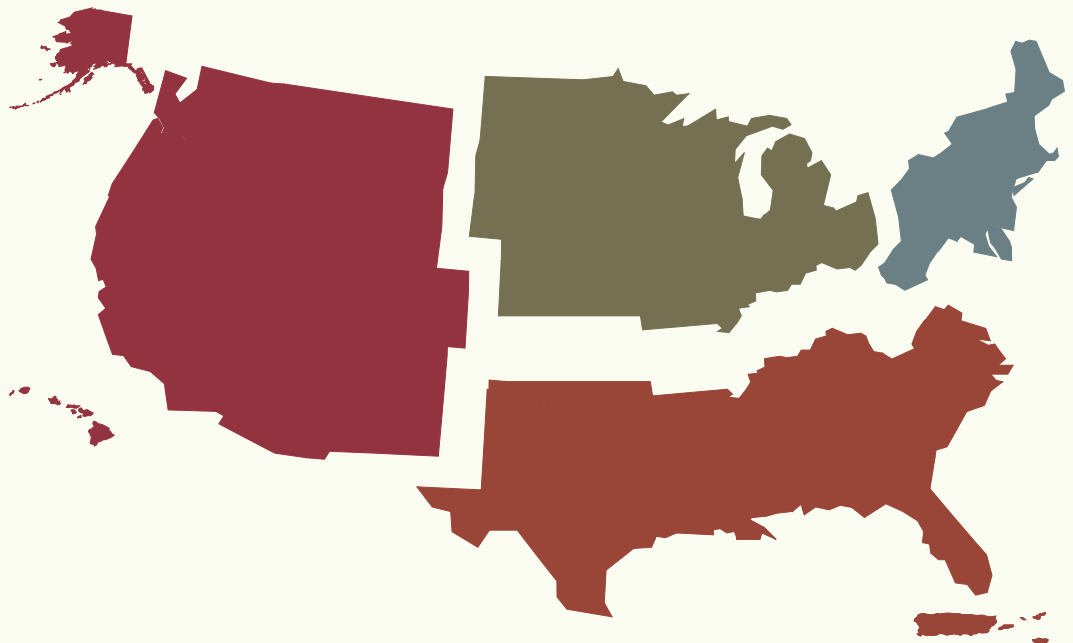
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