

# Resourcing Produce Safety Research and Extension



## Quick Facts

- Roughly 186,000 fruit and vegetable farms need resources and training to improve food safety practices and comply with new regulations
- Improvements in clinical diagnostics and epidemiology reveal the emergence of new pathogens, such as the parasite *Cyclospora* which causes ~150,000 illnesses in the U.S. each year
- Only 20% of research proposed to the USDA Specialty Crop Research Initiative is funded

## Background

There is a critical need to educate produce industry members on the successful identification, evaluation, and response to produce safety hazards and risks. This is particularly evident with managing agricultural water but applies to a breadth of current and future produce safety challenges. We face challenges with pathogens that are emerging, such as *Cyclospora*, and we continue to learn more about the complexity of our changing ecosystem and food system. Without investments in research, our produce production system and consumer health

may be at risk.

The industry need for guidance is great; without it, confidence in U.S. grown produce could be impacted as a result of produce related outbreaks. The industry leans heavily on the dwindling number of produce safety extension agents and the Produce Safety Alliance, which ensures the produce industry has access to the expertise needed to make educated, science-based decisions to protect public health.

## Produce Safety Research and Extension Opportunities Today

With the president's budget being considered and recognizing that Farm Bill deliberations are being considered, we urge you to invest in produce safety research, extension and outreach, including the following:

- \$3M annually for continued produce safety grower training required by regulation, as well as technical outreach, coordinated and administered through the Produce Safety Alliance
- Funding to USDA NIFA specific to *Cyclospora* at a level of \$5M, and increased support in the FY2023 budget as well as the Farm Bill related to specialty crop food safety research, both within

USDA ARS as well as for the broader research community

- Support for produce safety extension professionals at the state and local levels
- The development of a pipeline of diverse produce safety professionals, beginning at the collegiate level, through increased funding of programs such as the USDA National Needs graduate fellowships