
Healthy Farm, Strong Agriculture Project

Farm Health and Safety Training Survey 2024

The *Healthy Farm, Strong Agriculture* project is funded by the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission and implemented by the NC State Extension Farmworker Health and Safety Education program in collaboration with the County Cooperative Extension Centers. The project's funded target counties are Edgecombe, Nash, and Wilson.

The project goals include providing a menu of training options to farmers, helping them to identify farm health and safety needs, and assisting with access to mandatory training compliance needed for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Worker Protection Standards as well as training to optimize farm operations and increase worker overall health and well-being.

The Extension Farmworker Health and Safety Education program created a survey instrument to identify those needs. The tool was created as a Google form, with the primary target counties. The data collection steps included attending grower production meetings and following up directly with phone calls and text messages to increase survey participation. Additional efforts were made by conducting in-person farm visits as needed. Considering the data collection sites, growers from other counties completed the survey. However, the hard copy survey they completed did not include the question about the need for the Spanish Pesticide Applicator School, while the online version did. This data will be taken into consideration separately.

The target goal audience included farm owners and/or farm managers who may be hiring, managing, or supervising agricultural workers; the program was able to collect a total of 84 surveys, of which 53 were from the funded target counties, Wilson(38%), Nash(34%), and Edgecombe(34%) county. Most respondents reported tobacco and sweet potato as the top crops requiring farm labor by 88% and 75%, respectively. Other crops that were reported to be less than 20% each were cucumber, watermelon, and strawberries.

The findings from the survey from the funded counties are as follows:

About training that listed as needed because it is required by GAP Connections & EPA, general farm safety was at the top (94%), followed by heat stress (91%), and rounding out the top three was Green Tobacco Illness (85%). Additional required topics that also received a high response were farm equipment safety (81%), tobacco baler safety (77%), EPA WPS (75%), and CPR/First Aid/AED (64%). The following training needs were listed in the *other* open section of this question with one response by topic: forklift training, COVID, PPE, respirator fit testing, worker concern and poster, GAP hygiene, food safety, non-discrimination, housing and work rules, emergency response procedures, recognition of REI, certified pesticide applicator (proper pesticide storage, handling, application, and disposal), and grade separation. *Note:* topics are listed as written in the survey.

Training topics that are not regulatory but listed as needed for optimizing farm operations include Non-Tobacco Related Material (NTRM) Prevention (86%), worker food safety handling training (57%), and worker hygiene training (55%). In the *other* open section of this question, responses included portable

ladder safety, fall safety, vehicle, allergen training, worker housing cleanliness and maintenance, and cell phone usage during work.

In preparation for the 2024 season, the Extension Farmworker Health and Safety program wanted to gauge interest in the Pesticide Applicator School in Spanish and find ways to assist with increasing the pass rate. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the respondents saw a need for the school to be offered in Spanish. Suggestions in the open comment section included online videos, study guides, providing a training book, and having an intermediary between the farm owner and the employee.

The survey also asks about other educational needs to increase the workers' well-being, both at the job site and outside of work hours. Findings showed that employers saw a need for English as a Second Language (ESL) (80%), Alcohol and substance use (61%), mental health awareness (25%), and Digital literacy skills (16%). Suggestions in the open comment section included trafficking, harassment, first aid/CPR, hazing/bullying, and proper heat stress PPE. *Note:* topics are listed as written in the survey.

In the last portion of the survey, an additional open comment question allowed farmers to share any suggestions on how the Extension Farmworker Health and Safety education program could improve their operations. Notable comments included proper PPE, the request for our program to offer additional topic training, mental health resources for farmers, and cell usage.

The findings from the survey results from the other counties are as follows:

The target goal audience included farm owners and/or farm managers who may be hiring, managing, or supervising agricultural workers; the program was able to collect a total of 31 additional surveys, apart from the funded counties, Halifax (38%), Johnston (17%), Wake (13%) and Greene (8%) county. Additional counties with one response included Beaufort, Buncombe, Davidson, Harnett, Sampson, and Wayne counties. Most farm respondents reported tobacco and sweet potato as the top crops requiring farm labor by 83% and 21%, respectively. Other crops that were reported once were cucumber and seasonal vegetables.

About training listed as needed because it is required by GAP Connections & EPA, general farm safety was at the top (97%), followed by heat stress and Green Tobacco Illness with a similar response of (87%), and rounding out the top three was tobacco baler safety (81%). Additional required topics that also received a high response were Farm Equipment Safety and EPA WPS (71%) and CPR/First Aid/AED (61%).

Training topics that are not regulatory but listed as needed for optimizing farm operations included Non-Tobacco-Related Material (NTRM) Prevention (78%), Worker Food Safety Handling Training (61%), and Worker Hygiene Training (61%).

The survey also asks about other educational needs to increase the workers' well-being, both at the job site and outside of work hours. Findings showed that employers saw a need for English as a Second Language (ESL) (67%), Alcohol and substance use (63%), mental health awareness (25%), and Digital literacy skills (21%).

Conclusion

The survey's findings led to identifying a list of top farmworker employers' training needs that combine mandatory and non-mandatory training to optimize farm operations and workers' well-being. The results in funded counties and other counties were similar.

The identified *training needs* supported the development of a preliminary menu, including the training the Extension Farmworker Health and Safety Program delivers. The menu also lists a few training resources provided by the program's partners in Edgecombe, Nash, and Wilson Counties. In those cases, the employer must contact and make arrangements directly with the agency involved. As mentioned, this is a preliminary list and will be expanded in the next year. Additionally, the agricultural community might be aware of other resources in the area.

Given that Spanish is the primary language of most farmworkers, the menu lists training provided in **Spanish** and is free of charge unless otherwise specified. Training provided by external resources might require a fee for interpretation or training materials.

* A fee might be associated

Type of Training	Extension Health and Safety Program	Other Training Providers
GAP & EPA Mandatory Training		
General farm safety	To be developed	GAP Connections * Contact: Amy Rochkes Training & Resource Coordinator (865) 622-4606, Extension 107 arochkes@gapconnections.com
Heat stress	Contact: Estefania Ramirios Extension Farmworker Educator Ph: (252)883-9678 Email: jeramiri@ncs.edu	GAP Connections * Contact: Amy Rochkes Training & Resource Coordinator (865) 622-4606, Extension 107 arochkes@gapconnections.com
Green Tobacco Illness	Contact: Estefania Ramirios Extension Farmworker Educator Ph: (252)883-9678 Email: jeramiri@ncs.edu	GAP Connections * Contact: Amy Rochkes Training & Resource Coordinator (865) 622-4606, Extension 107 arochkes@gapconnections.com
Farm Equipment Safety	Yet to be determined	GAP Connections * Contact: Amy Rochkes Training & Resource Coordinator (865) 622-4606, Extension 107 arochkes@gapconnections.com

Tobacco Baler Safety	To be developed	GAP Connections * Contact: Amy Rochkes Training & Resource Coordinator (865) 622-4606, Extension 107 arochkes@gapconnections.com
EPA WPS	Contact: Estefania Ramirios Extension Farmworkers Educator Ph: (252)883-9678 Email: jeramiri@ncs.edu	GAP Connections * Contact: Amy Rochkes Training & Resource Coordinator (865) 622-4606, Extension 107 arochkes@gapconnections.com
Basic CPR/First Aid/AED	To be developed	ACCESS EAST Contact: Juan Allen juan.allen@accesseast.org (252) 402-4370
Non-mandatory training to optimize farm operations		
Non-Tobacco Related Material (NTRM) Prevention	Upon request, this topic could be included in the standard Extension Farmworker Training. The training content will be based on the educational materials followed by the farm, e.g., the NTRM poster developed by the Tobacco Associate, INC.	GAP Connections * Contact: Amy Rochkes Training & Resource Coordinator (865) 622-4606, Extension 107 arochkes@gapconnections.com
Worker Food Safety Handling Training	To be developed	NC State Extension Contact: Chip Simmons, III Area Specialized Agent, Agriculture - Fresh Produce Food Safety (Eastern NC) Funding for interpretation might be needed.
Non-mandatory training to optimize workers' well-being		
English as a Second Language (ESL)	No	Description: Classes for English language learners. In-campus ESL classes, evenings, and weekend schedules. Consult with the contact person regarding the schedule and requirements. Edgecombe Community College https://edgecombe.edu/programs/college-and-career-readiness/english-language-acquisition/

		<p>(252) 618-6566</p> <p>Wilson Community College Contact: Vernita Williams (252) 246-1340 vwilliams@wilsoncc.edu</p> <p><u>Nash Community College</u> https://www.nashcc.edu/academics/continuing-education-programs/english-as-a-second-language/ Contact: Roselyn Pemberton (252) 451-8215 rapemberton859@nashcc.edu</p>
Alcohol and substance use	No	<p>ACCESS EAST Contact: Juan Allen juan.allen@accesseast.org (252) 402-4370</p>
Digital literacy skills	Yes, educational tool on: <i>Connecting NC Staying Informed and Connected Using Your Smartphone</i>	
Proper PPE usage	PPE is included in the standard training in accordance with WPS requirements	
Mental health resources for farmers and farmworkers (English & Spanish)	In development	<p>NC Agromedicine Institute Contact: McKayla R. Robinette, Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN-NC) 252-744-7993 Mobile: 252-907-2945 NC Farm Helpline: 844-325-3276</p> <p>NC DHHS - Need Someone to talk to? Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 988 call, text, or chat 24/7</p> <p>Southern Ag Exchange Network Hotline 833 - 381 - 7243 call, text or chat 24/7</p>