

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Idaho Food Safety Cooperative helps food manufacturers

AT A GLANCE

UI Extension and TechHelp assist food manufacturing entrepreneurs with their food safety plans and food manufacturing businesses.

The Situation

Small food manufacturers encounter many roadblocks as they are building their food manufacturing businesses. They are frequently a one-person operation and so must wear many hats from operations, to research and development, to marketing and sales, to logistics, to quality and food safety manager. In addition, as they grow they need to be able to manage different state and local regulations; in addition to the audits required by larger retailers. Our program helps those manufacturers by providing basic food safety understanding and the necessary certifications to be in compliance with the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) specifically the Preventive Controls for Human Food rule. This rule requires a food manufacturer have a food safety plan that meets the requirements of the legislation. Small food manufacturers frequently do not come from a food safety background and navigating all the different regulations and understanding the science of making a product safe for human consumption can be very daunting and challenging. In FY 2020 lacking a hazard analysis (a very large component of a food safety plan) was the number two most cited violation reported by the FDA. Unfortunately, this has been a frequently cited issue for the past several years.



Participants of Idaho Food Safety Cooperative in classroom learning about food safety principles.

Our Response

The Idaho Food Safety Cooperative (IFSC) program was started with a grant from NIST (National Institute of Technologies) to TechHelp (Idaho's Manufacturing Extension Partnership). The program was funded for three years. Included in the program is the necessary curriculum and templates to create a food safety plan that will comply with FDA requirement, a required third-party certificate and free consulting time. The consulting time can be used for anything related to their food business not just food safety. Because of the generosity of the grant we have been able to offer the program free of charge if the participants meet some basic requirements. The program is valued at \$10,000.

Originally the program was designed to be face-to-face. In 2020 we were mid-way through the curriculum when the Covid-19 travel restrictions went into place and so had to pivot to a hybrid. In 2021 we started the program with a lot of uncertainty around Covid-19 restrictions and travel, we decided to try yet another approach. Instead of six — four-hour classroom sessions, we broke the material up into 26 shorter more targeted sessions. The curriculum still includes all the templates and helpful guides. Business owners utilize our internal learning management system to interact with videos and self-paced curriculum. The modified approach allows food producers to complete at their own pace and review the curriculum when it is convenient for them based on their family and business obligations.

Program Outcomes

Six companies took advantage of this program in 2019, 16 companies in 2020 and we currently have 10 companies in 2021. Past participants of the Idaho Food Safety Cooperative (IFSC) have reported \$109,800 in new sales, and \$122,500 in cost savings and \$979,200 in retained sales because of the skills learned in this program.

Below are some comments from previous participants in the IFSC program.

- “The timing of our completing the Food Safety program with TechHelp was really perfect in relation to this current virus situation... Fortunately, we had our food safety plan in place, and were able to add a few additional policies and procedures to address the new requirements for keeping an essential business open and safe in the midst of COVID-19. We were able to make the plan changes from home, and since we had a solid food safety

team trained and in place, we were able to keep the roaster running safely with no interruptions. If we did not have the training TechHelp provided, it would have been much harder to adjust to, and document, the new reality of shared workspaces.”

— *Jim Hottenroth, Roasting Manager of Doma Coffee*

- “Until taking this class I didn't realize how ignorant I was about food safety. With no HACCP plan in place, ... As a result of this class however I have revamped my food safety practices. I have taken steps to ensure my employees also have a better understanding of food safety. I have eliminated the rental of two kitchens in order to keep products at a more manageable temperature; everything from prep to production to distribution now takes place from one spot... The instructors are highly knowledgeable and have a desire to see the success of businesses such as mine. I would highly recommend this as a priority to all who are considering the food industry.” — *Sevana Saroyan, Co-Owner of SEVZ Kitchen*
- “The information was invaluable. I am increasing value added processing on our farm and while we aren't at a go yet the knowledge has really helped me avoid some very expensive mistakes that could have made in designing our facility. The instructors are wonderful knowledgeable and accessible. This program was amazing and I really appreciate having this opportunity. Trying to start a small manufacturing endeavor seemed insurmountable but this made it seem doable and really helped me as a small business see things that wouldn't have even been on my radar without it.” — *Heidi Tubbs, Managing Partner Tubbs' Berry Farm*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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