



Photo: Fat Toad Farm.

FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION SUPPORTS THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

Vermont has an international reputation for high-quality specialty food products. When businesses expand product lines into larger markets, they must provide stringent proof to buyers that internationally accepted food safety practices are followed. Learning and adopting these practices is a daunting task for any small business.

UVM Extension'

Partnerships with the Vermont Department of Health (VTDH), the VTDH Laboratory, the International HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) Schools Network

from the Grocery Manufacturers Association, UVM Extension offers necessary training and certification for food processors.

Over two years, Oyarzabal delivered 19 trainings (many with certification) to 258 people and provided direct consultations to businesses in ten Vermont counties. So far, 35 businesses have made improvements to their operations including completing or implementing food safety plans, thanks to Oyarzabal's training and guidance.

Visit go.uvm.edu/producer-food-safety for more information on UVM Extension food safety programs for commercial producers.

Ten years ago, Fat Toad Farm was a small-scale diversified farm making cheese and caramel on a dirt road in Brookfield, Vermont. The business now sells its award-winning goat's milk caramel sauces nationwide. Food safety has always been a priority, but the world of national distribution pushed them to the next level. They took advantage of Omar Oyarzabal's expertise to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), and to guide them as they look toward expansion. Improvements like these better position Fat Toad Farm to capture a national retail market, ultimately supporting local business and Vermont agriculture.

HELPING MAPLE MAKE THE GRADE

Pure maple syrup is a special, high-value sweetener that derives much of its worth from its unique flavor. Though consumers rarely taste sub-par maple, damaged or “off-flavor” syrup can and does occur. When syrup does not meet legal standards for sale, its value drops 50 percent. It is up to the producer to protect their bottom line by detecting off-flavored syrup before it reaches a retail container.

UVM Extension Maple Specialist Mark Isselhardt led the design of the off-flavor syrup reference set in 2017 to help producers become familiar with detecting the taste of naturally occurring off-flavors in syrup. The 1,600 sets produced contain three 1.7-ounce bottles of metabolism, buddy and sour sap off-flavors.

This project was a collaborative effort among a large maple syrup packer, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and UVM Extension. Though most sets were sold to producers in Vermont, nearly 400 went to those outside the state. The North American Maple Syrup Council distributed kits to producers in 13 states and four Canadian provinces.

As the largest producer of maple in the United States, a major initiative

