

## WORKSHOPS STRENGTHEN FOOD SAFETY CAPACITY AMONG NEPALESE GROWERS AND EXTENSION WORKERS

*FEED THE FUTURE INNOVATION LAB FOR FOOD SAFETY*



*A participant asks a question at a food safety workshop for produce growers and extension workers in Nepal.*

By Olivia Hall

Nepal's government is promoting the production and consumption of fresh produce to alleviate food and nutritional insecurity in the country. However, inadequate food safety practices can jeopardize the intended benefits of eating more nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables. To promote the adoption of food safety practices within Nepal's fresh produce systems, a project funded by the [Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Safety \(FSIL\)](#) recently trained more than 240 farmers and extension workers through five produce safety workshops held in produce hubs across the country.

"Food safety is an emerging issue in government policy, but stakeholders in fresh produce systems still have low awareness," said Aditya Khanal, associate professor in the Department of Agricultural Business and Education in the College of Agriculture at Tennessee State University and leader of the project [Market-led food safety in Nepal: Harnessing production incentives and consumer awareness](#). "Awareness among stakeholders involved in fresh produce systems – such as growing, handling, and consuming the fresh produce – is highly important."

Because they are frequently consumed raw, fruits and salad vegetables are of particular concern as carrying a risk for microbial foodborne illness. Vegetables are vulnerable to contamination with foodborne pathogens through many sources, such as contact with poor-quality contaminated water on farms or in homes, incompletely or improperly composted animal manure, and uncooked meat in markets or during meal preparation. Raising awareness among growers of the risks and promoting the adoption of recommended on-farm practices is key to preventing foodborne illness for consumers.

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Workshop attendees included fresh produce growers and extension service providers – many of them women and youth – who could share their new knowledge and skills in their communities to build greater food safety capacity. Sessions in five major produce market connection hubs across the country – Itahari, Kohalpur, Bharatpur, Pokhara, and the capital city of Kathmandu – attracted a total of 244 participants.

Organized by Nepal's [Agriculture and Forestry University \(AFU\)](#), the workshops featured food safety specialists and food microbiologists from partner and collaborating institutions, including the Nepal Agricultural Research Council, the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control, the Plant Quarantine and Pesticide Management Center, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

In each session, participants learned about the importance of food safety and were trained in Good Agriculture Practices (GAPs) that assist farmers in identifying and controlling risk factors on their farms. Applying these tools reduces the risk of contamination from microorganisms and pesticide residues during the growing, harvesting, and post-harvest handling of produce.

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive.

“This training is a new kind,” said Rabi Dhital, who participated in the Bharatpur workshop. “Due to a lack of food safety training for vegetable and fruit producers, we’ve faced difficulty in safer production. We realized that microbial food safety matters, along with several others.”

Extension agent Anjali Shrestha, who also attended the Bharatpur training, noted the importance of increasing consumer awareness about food safety and was prepared to share what she’d learned about reducing the risk of contamination during production with farmers in her area.

“We need to be very careful while preparing the compost,” said Shrestha. “There are greater chances of the food getting unhygienic from the compost not getting well prepared or not well decomposed. So we can extend this information to our farmers.”

Ram Hari Timilsina, the Nepal lead for the project, sees the workshops as success, but not only in terms of outreach and raising food safety awareness. He views the workshops as the project’s first step in initiating a transition towards safer practices, helping to reduce foodborne illnesses, increase consumer trust in locally produced food, and boost compliance with international food safety regulations. Timilsina hopes that as participants apply and share this information in their farming communities, it will spark larger-scale change.

“They were thrilled to participate and quickly picked up a lot of knowledge,” said Timilsina, who is an associate professor in the Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology at AFU. “The majority of participants now believe that fresh produce food safety is crucial, even though they were unaware of it previously. The workshops are undoubtedly a turning point in terms of the needs of the growers.”

Timilsina and Khanal have convened a team to develop a training manual on produce safety as a resource for the country’s extension agents and farmers, and future workshops will address consumers’ food safety awareness. In April, the project anticipates bringing public, private, and NGO stakeholders together in a workshop to map a path forward for practical policy-level interventions in Nepal.

“My hope is that the workshops we just completed and the food safety research and outreach through this project will be a milestone to initiate the rapid expansion of food safety-ensured or enhanced good agricultural and business practices in fresh produce systems,” Khanal said.

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*Olivia Hall is a freelance writer with the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Safety. The lab is one of more than 20 Innovation Labs with U.S. universities under Feed the Future, the U.S. government's global hunger and food security initiative led by USAID.*

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