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NEWS COLUMN

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION
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Food safety issues highlight 2011 Good Agricultural Practices workshops

URBANA – Food safety begins with sound practices on the farm. Illinois produce and livestock producers are encouraged to attend one of University of Illinois Extension’s Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) workshops this spring.

Two identical workshops will be offered at the Countryside Extension Center in Countryside on March 23 and at the Kankakee County Extension Office in Bourbonnais on April 7 for producers interested in learning about produce food safety, post-harvest produce handling, water quality and testing, soil management, manure management, worker health and hygiene, and auditing farms for GAPs and food safety. Speakers include James Theuri, Peter Chege, Maurice Ogutu and Ellen Phillips. A USDA auditor will also share what to expect during an audit.

“Recent outbreaks of foodborne illnesses involving both fresh and processed food products have heightened public concern about food safety,” said Ellen Phillips, U of I Extension educator in crop systems. “Increasingly more consumers want to know how their food is grown.”

Many fresh-produce retailers are beginning to require that their producers have third-party audits to verify safe food production and handling practices on the farm.

“The recently signed bill to overhaul food safety underscores the growing emphasis on food safety and the need for fresh-produce farmers to produce a safe product,” Phillips said.

This workshop offers benefits to producers, retailers and wholesalers in supermarkets and farmer’s markets, and even business owners in service industries, Phillips said. In particular, the GAPs workshop will equip producers with the knowledge to put together a written food safety plan. By becoming food-safety compliant, producers will stay competitive in the specialty produce business.

Pre-registration is required through the corresponding office location where you plan to attend. To register for the Countryside workshop, visit <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/countrysidecenter>. To register for the Bourbonnais workshop, visit <http://kankakee.extension.uiuc.edu>. The cost per participant, including lunch, is \$30 and \$25 for additional employees or family members (sharing the curriculum). Space is limited.

For more information on the Countryside workshop, call 708-352-0109. For more information on the Bourbonnais workshop, call 815-933-8337.

U of I Extension offers practical, research-based programs that help people improve their lives and address critical community issues involving youth, families, economics, health and natural resources. U of I Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this program, please contact the Unit Office at least two weeks prior to the event.

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