

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION (DATCP)
PRODUCE SAFETY ADVISORY COUNCIL (PSAC) MEETING**

MINUTES

Date: November 19, 2025

Time: 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Location: Microsoft Teams Webinar

DATCP Division: Food and Recreational Safety

Welcome and Introductions

Call to order: Steve Louis called the meeting to order at 9:31AM.

Open meeting notice: This meeting is a public meeting subject to public records requests, and information was posted inviting public comments. No public comments were received.

Introduction of voting members

Present: Steve Louis, Oakwood Fruit Farm; Corey Miller, Organic Valley and Cropp Cooperative; Mike Klemp-North, Hsu Ginseng Farms and Hsu's Ginseng Enterprises Inc; Hsing-Yi Hsieh, Festival Foods; Jenna LaChance, Organic Valley and Cropp Cooperative; Jeff Mears, WI Tribal Conservation Advisory Council; Wayne Geist, Bushel and a Peck Market; Josh Rimmert, Alsum Produce.

Not present: Sara Ecker, Ecker's Apples; Lavern Zeist, Lavern Zeist Farm and Plain Communities and Cultures Representative; Jay Ellingson, Kwik Trip; Susan Quam, WI Restaurant Association; Dan Corneillus, Intertribal Agriculture Council.

Introduction of ex-officio (non-voting) members

Present: Ryan Bennett, DATCP (DFRS); Krystal Martin, DATCP (DFRS); Nichole Kirk, DATCP (DFRS-Produce); Troy Sprecker, DATCP (DFRS); Eric Scheftgen, DATCP (DTCP); Karl Doyle, DATCP (DTCP).

Not present: Kobby Antwi, DATCP (DFRS); Adam Brock, DATCP (DFRS).

Introduction of guests

No guests present.

Quorum: Steve verified that a majority of members are present to establish a quorum.

Approval of the agenda as presented: Steve called for a motion. Hsing-Yi made a motion, and Corey seconded it. With none opposed, the motion carried.

Approval of the minutes of the August 20, 2025 meeting: Steve called for a motion. Corey made a motion, and Mike seconded it. With none opposed, the motion carried.

Council Membership Management

Status of Produce and Processed Foods Advisory Council (PPFAC)

Troy shared an update on the status of the Produce Safety Advisory Council (PSAC), acknowledging that the group has previously deliberated potential improvements and changes.

Troy shared the group's history. The PSAC started in 2018 as an unofficial council and was built out of the need and desire to have industry input regarding the Produce Safety Rule (PSR). The original directive for the group was to explore applications of the PSR in the state of Wisconsin, including inspections, education and outreach. We are currently finishing up the current 5-year grant cycle with FDA, which provides funds, writes rules, and sets boundaries for our program. As we move into the next FDA grant cycle, our priorities are likely to change.

The PSAC and its mission has changed and grown over the years, and the program's needs continue to change as well. Leaderships believe the group met the original purpose and accomplished our original mandate. We value and need industry connections and engagement, but possibly in a less officious manner.

Troy posed the question: *How do we keep all the positives gained from this group and identify the next tool?*

Hsing-Yi commented that this group values produce safety and would like to support DATCP however is needed to advance produce safety; however, she agrees that without a mature produce safety program, a council is not the best way to support DATCP.

Wayne asked if this group is still able to continue as a committee.

Troy answered Wayne's question sharing that a committee is a possibility, however with a broader scope that is not only focused on produce. Bureau leadership has discussed the need for a manufactured foods advisory group, where input and membership from produce stakeholders may be necessary.

Troy shared that he and Krystal still value industry communication and input and would like to maintain stakeholder relationships.

Krystal shared that this group has experienced a lot of wins over the years, and we are set up in a way to continue our work and inspections. This year, inspections ran more smoothly than ever. Manufactured foods staff were cross trained to complete produce inspections, which is an important part of the farm to table industry in Wisconsin. Krystal would like to continue to connect through trainings, conference involvement and informal opportunities. She values the knowledge industry leaders share and wants to hear from the people involved in pre-processing and growing. Krystal stressed that this is an opportunity to stay connected in a different capacity, and not the end of produce safety discussions and involvement. Krystal is very appreciative of this council, as the council has been a very important part of Krystal's time within produce.

Steve asked about the next steps. *Will we discuss the possibility of disbanding at the next meeting? Is there any official action that needs to occur within the group, such as a vote for which we need a quorum?*

Troy responded that the topic of disbanding needs to be a major agenda item for the next meeting. He will also check with the legal team for next steps.

Krystal and Troy will be available for informal discussions regarding the future of the council and the possibility of disbanding.

Agency Reports

Program administration update

Federal changes and effect on food safety

Krystal shared that DATCP is experiencing significant funding reductions for the 2026 fiscal year. However, the impact on the produce program is minimal, as we've spent multiple years developing an effective system and we've prioritized a level of intentionality. We have been able to utilize permanent staff for produce-specific tasks, meaning we've been able to complete project work with less project-specific staff. We've been able to redistribute time and create systems to be successful.

During the government shutdown, we were informed that we could still operate as usual, even though we are a federally funded program. We operated as usual, relying on our collaborative relationships with other states, as our FDA program manager was unavailable as a resource during the shutdown.

As Troy shared earlier, we are ending a five-year grant cycle and are waiting for our next Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to define our priorities and work for the next five years. We can expect delays in receiving our new NOFO, due to the government shutdown. However, all signs point to this next grant agreement being something we would pursue and be able to meet the objectives of.

Within our current five-year grant agreement, we are in a really good position to wrap up the final year. Inspection staff have completed approximately 90% of the inspections required. We are maintaining an appropriate level of outreach, although FDA has deprioritized it.

With the overall reduction in funding, FDA has decreased administrative requirements, meaning we can really focus on completing our work, instead of FDA reporting. Overall, produce is navigating federal changes very well.

Mike shared that the shutdown impacted export inspections within the ginseng industry. But it's picking back up.

Corey shared that he is aware of a few groups working on PSA training alternatives due to the lack of PSA funding, including California Farm Stewardship Association and a group out in California, whose acronym is CALF. He suggested that there may be opportunities for WI growers to take these trainings.

Krystal shared that PSA training is advertised on the Safe Wisconsin Produce DATCP website, and we are working on sending out the training details to people on our inventory lists. Krystal requested that council members advertise the training within their respective groups. We don't know how long PSA trainings will be maintained at a federal level, and PSA capabilities and functions are limited. Krystal just received notice that PSA is no longer processing any new lead trainer applications, so the current number of lead trainers that exist is all we have. PSA is unsure about future government funding. However, the PSR states that produce safety training must be an approved curriculum. Krystal asked the group if there are other avenues that people are using for approved trainings. Krystal also asked if anyone has ideas for long-term solutions to ensure people can minimize risk and still get safety training.

Corey shared that Organic Valley is having informal discussions around training, and asked if anyone was aware of the number of produce growers that are required to get a third-party audit for buying access? The goal post of training requirements keeps moving and prices keep increasing. Buyers keep demanding more, and small growers are getting priced out and don't know where to go for training. The USDA raised the price for a harmonized audit.

Krystal asked how we can make sure the PSA training and certification is enough to fulfill buyer requirements. She's uncertain that anything can be done at the state level, and a solution would need to come from the federal level.

Jeff mentioned that it's important to have standardized training for liability reasons. Federal standards are just the minimum, and act as a building block.

Josh shared that potato growers are required to have PSA training, and packing houses must follow HACCP requirements and controls for human food. Josh agrees that unfortunately, the big buying giants are holding back small producers by increasing requirements and costs.

Corey shared that PSA trainings are a great place to start. The curriculum gets you thinking about food safety and provides a base for potentially meeting 3rd party audits. Producers need the base level of PSA training for introduction, followed by more training and accreditation opportunities.

Krystal shared that DATCP has a commitment to maintain some accessibility and a level of education and training. There is a need for PSA trainings, even if only at a small level. Wisconsin has tried to keep the cost of trainings low, and Krystal is personally committed to trainings, even if FDA reduces outreach funding.

Outreach updates

PSA training at Growing Wisconsin

This topic was discussed above, and no further discussion proceeded.

Development of memo

Krystal shared that we've seen several covered and inspectable farms move locations without notifying DATCP this year. This makes the inspection planning process difficult and doesn't allow farms to receive notice prior to inspection. Krystal posed a question to the group regarding whether DATCP should spend time developing a memo for farmers. Krystal asked the group if others have experienced this.

Krystal shared that she spoke with Lavern, who shared that it's a very common occurrence for people to move farms and houses in plain communities.

Jenna shared her experience at Organic Valley. A grower's organic certification must include an accurate address, so growers must share with Organic Valley if they move locations. It's also helpful that Organic Valley is the market for growers, so growers must comply with OV requirements if they want to sell their produce to OV. Jenna mentions that she's unsure if a memo will be fruitful and effective.

Inventory updates

2026 Produce Survey Renewal

Nichole shared that she is working with Krystal to review and update the Produce Renewal Survey for 2026. We would like to take a different approach next year and intentionally reach out to specific farmers. It is unnecessary and inefficient to reach out to farmers that we hear from regularly or that are not covered by the PSR. We will likely reach out to covered farms to verify status, as well as farms we haven't heard from in 3+ years.

Inspection Updates

Wash Tanks

Krystal shared that we collected water samples in wash systems, such as dunk tanks, recirculated wash systems, etc., this year. Our test results showed that both untreated and treated systems came back with significant levels of E. coli. This is concerning, however, the PSR does not require wash systems to be treated. Krystal encouraged everyone to ask more questions and verify process when washing.

"Kill steps" stance of processing plant

Krystal shared that she's seen several farms identify washing as a kill step, which is not sufficient. Water treatment does not kill bacteria off produce, instead it treats the water to reduce cross-contamination potential. We've also run into multiple processors this year that were utilizing water treatment as a kill step. It is not acceptable to have poor handling practices prior to washing. This also highlights the importance and need for PSA training.

Member Updates and Issues/Further Discussion

State of industry

Steve shared that apple growers are done harvesting, but pack houses are continuing to pack. He reported an average crop this year in Wisconsin, due to weather, and it seems that the apple crop is slightly above average, nationwide.

Jenna shared that the Organic Valley season is winding down, except for storage crops, such as winter squash, brussel sprouts, and beets. She reported that this year was an average year for vegetables in WI due to weather and nationwide based on market availability.

Krystal shared her experiences from inspections and farmer interactions, reporting that many farmers left cucumber and melon commodities to die on the vine due to low selling cost. Jenna confirms she noticed that as well.

No other updates were shared by members.

Audit cost increases

Krystal asked the group if anyone is experiencing impacts from cost increases, and if there is anything we can do at the state level to help.

Corey asked if it's possible for someone to write grants to help offset costs. Help in this area would be a benefit to food safety for growers in Wisconsin. Corey shared the example of growers being reimbursed for harmonized audits by Wegmans. Corey also shared that he is continually seeing the cost of 3rd party audits increase, and farms can't keep up.

Krystal responded that this is out of our scope, however, we can ask the Division of Ag. Development if they have any additional knowledge and/or resources.

Traceability

This is a carry-over topic from last meeting.

Krystal shared that DATCP has an established traceability work group, and the group is seeing a lot of questions. Krystal requested that council members share thoughts about how this topic impacts the produce industry.

Corey shared his concerns regarding the confusion with compliance dates that keep getting pushed back, and the ability for plain community growers (~99% of OV farmers fall within that group) to comply with paper records (i.e. not having access to technological resources and/or updates).

Hsing Yi shared that traceability is very complicated at the retail level, noting that retailers almost always require records, even when buying from small, local growers who may be exempt. Hsing-Yi provided the

example that at Festival they would have to maintain about 8 million records a year, which is difficult to accomplish.

Krystal reiterated that a traceability work group exists, and she is happy to route communications to them. Troy shared that he would connect Hsing Yi with Sai, who is a DATCP employee and lead for the work group.

Flooding

This is carry-over topic from last meeting. There were no additional comments or questions.

Summary of Action Items, Person/s Responsible

DATCP Produce Team and PSAC leadership will continue to discuss the future of the council. Expect informative emails prior to next meeting, scheduled for February 18, 2026.

Also at the next meeting, Krystal hopes to share additional information about the next Notice of Funding Opportunity and its impacts on the produce program.

Let Steve, Corey, Krystal, Troy, or Nichole know if you have an agenda item to add for a future meeting and/or resources to share.

Adjourn

At 11:17 AM, Corey motioned to adjourn the meeting, Jenna seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.