

The Influence of Production Hygiene Training on Farming Practices Employed by Rural Small-Scale Organic Farmers - South Africa

Authors : Mdluli Fezile, Schmidt Stefan, Thamaga-Chitja Joyce

Abstract : In view of the frequently reported foodborne disease outbreaks caused by contaminated fresh produce, consumers have a preference for foods that meet requisite hygiene standards to reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses. Producing good quality fresh produce then becomes critical in improving market access and food security, especially for small-scale farmers. Questions of hygiene and subsequent microbiological quality in the rural small-scale farming sector of South Africa are even more crucial, given the policy drive to develop small-scale farming as a measure for reinforcement of household food security and reduction of poverty. Farming practices and methods, throughout the fresh produce value chain, influence the quality of the final product, which in turn determines its success in the market. This study's aim was to therefore determine the extent to which training on organic farming methods, including modules such as Importance of Production Hygiene, influenced the hygienic farming practices employed by eTholeni small-scale organic farmers in uMbumbulu, KwaZulu-Natal- South Africa. Questionnaires were administered to 73 uncertified organic farmers and analysis showed that a total of 33 farmers were trained and supplied the local Agri-Hub while 40 had not received training. The questionnaire probed respondents' attitudes, knowledge of hygiene and composting practices. Data analysis included descriptive statistics such as the Chi-square test and a logistic regression model. Descriptive analysis indicated that a majority of the farmers (60%) were female, most of which (73%) were above the age of 40. The logistic regression indicated that factors such as farmer training and prior experience in the farming sector had a significant influence on hygiene practices both at 5% significance levels. These results emphasize the importance of training, education and farming experience in implementing good hygiene practices in small-scale farming. It is therefore recommended that South African policies should advocate for small-scale farmer training, not only for subsistence purposes, but also with an aim of supplying produce markets with high fresh produce.

Keywords : small-scale farmers, leafy salad vegetables, organic produce, food safety, hygienic practices, food security

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