



Safety for People and Products

For all members of California Tomato Farmers, nothing is more important than safety. When people are involved, safety becomes even more critical. Sun Pacific's highest priority is ensuring the safety of both its people and its product.

Although Sun Pacific is one of the state's largest and most sophisticated farming businesses — one that has been growing and packing fresh tomatoes since 1982 — it employs a commercial harvest company to attract and maintain the most well-trained workforce.

“There is just so much involved today in training workers to follow food safety and worker safety protocols,” explains Steve Fortner, farming manager for Sun Pacific Tomato Growers. “We have found that in addition to doing our own training and supervising of workers, it helps to have someone whose full-time job is to oversee our harvest crews.”

That's why for the past 25 years, Sun Pacific has relied on a company called Summer Harvest to oversee the harvest of its fresh market tomato crop. For Sun Pacific, this job runs from early July through October and requires a company with much experience. Like Sun Pacific, Summer Harvest is exceedingly experienced in harvest operations, with 30 years in the business and a stellar worker training program.

“The food safety program employed by Sun Pacific and required of all California Tomato Farmers members is very comprehensive,” Fortner said.

Fortner noted that the job of training harvest crews in food safety begins before the season starts, when foremen and supervisors receive an extensive training session. After that, the people on each harvest crew receive training once a month.

All members of California Tomato Farmers are subject to mandatory food safety inspections by USDA-trained inspectors who visit each field and conduct one unannounced audit during the season. As part of the harvest crews of Sun Pacific, all workers must be able to recite the food safety precautions.

“USDA inspectors will often stop workers and ask them to recite Sun Pacific's food safety policies pertaining to these issues,” Fortner said. “Workers must know the answers if we are to pass our audit.”

Not only is it important for workers to understand the food safety requirements, but they must know and abide by several practices designed to protect their own safety. Heat illness prevention is a serious concern for workers who harvest in the hot San Joaquin Valley.



California already has the most stringent heat illness prevention requirements. But like other California Tomato Farmers members, Sun Pacific goes above and beyond these safety margins.

For example, California law requires that shade be provided for workers when temperatures rise above 85 degrees. At Sun Pacific, shade is always offered, and it comes in the form of Summer Harvest's specially-designed shade trailers that provide aluminum benches and tables where workers can take cover from the hot sun. Cold water is provided as well.

Summer Harvest also has special lunch trailers that provide shade, seating and air circulation for the workers' comfort. Also provided is a self-contained space so that workers can eat and still comply with food safety requirements.

Emergency training is also required for all foremen so that they know how to treat anyone who may appear to be suffering from heat illness. This training program is checked by government personnel from Cal-OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Agency) who visit fields regularly during the summer to verify that laws are being followed and that foremen and supervisors know how to treat workers who may be getting too hot.

More important than the specific laws and requirements found on these Web sites is the hard work and training that goes into ensuring workers follow safety practices daily. This requires dedication, experience, and care for the people employed — and there is no shortage of any of these qualities at Sun Pacific.