

Food Safety and Biosecurity Policy Considerations When conducting Agri-Tourism at Baetje Farms LLC

SARE Project: Best Practices for Safe, On-Farm Educational Programming: A Cheesemakers Perspective

Background:

In cheese making facilities and other food processing facilities, specific food security considerations need to be address before bringing the public into an active processing facility. The following annotated bibliography will guide you as you follow our assessment of Baetje Farms and conducting cheese classes and on-farm tours with proper food safety and biosecurity policies in place.

Outline of project:

We began our project with hosting on-site cheese making classes at Baetje Farms. There was a lot of interest for coming to the farm and learning about cheese making, however though we received a lot of interest, there were few that wanted to actually pay the required cost. We hosted two classes successfully. At this cost we did not feel it was profitable enough to continue to offer cheese making classes on site long term so we reset the program to offer “On-Farm Tours”. These “On-Farm Tours” included a brief history of Baetje Farms, a tour of the barn and milking parlor, and concluded with a cheese tasting. This proved much more profitable as many customers did not mind spending \$15 per person and many purchased cheese to take home after the tour, in addition it took less time to conduct and the bio-security issues were greatly reduced.

Execution of food safety and biosecurity for project:

As we look to define a food safety plan for our project we reviewed our current policy on Good Manufacturing Practices, Procedures and Regulations. We also reviewed our current business insurance plan to ensure we had proper coverage should a visitor be injured or cause injury at the farm and cheese plant.

There were several factors that we felt were necessary as follows:

CHEESE MAKING CLASSES FOOD SAFETY AND BIOSECURITY STEPS

Cheese making classes were offered to small groups and lasted 8 hours. Individuals began by sitting in a classroom setting outside of our cheese making facility where they went through a powerpoint presentation with Alison Penalver. They were briefed on food safety and biosecurity as they learned basic cheese making steps. While in the classroom setting the food safety and biosecurity risk was low, it allowed the visitors time for education and familiarity with their surroundings in a relaxed atmosphere before entrance to the facility.

UPON ENTRANCE TO CHEESE PLANT ALL VISITORS MUST OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING:

***SHOE COVERS:** eliminate outside contamination by requiring shoe covers before entering facility (we know that shoes travel everywhere we do and we do not want to bring any outside microorganisms or bacteria into our facility)

***HAIR NETS:** required to prevent contamination of facility and food product

***LAB COAT:** required to protect food facility from outside contaminants that may be on an individual's clothing

***HAND WASHING:** all individuals are required to wash hands before entering the facility

***INTRO TO FOOD SAFETY BRIEF:**

We began our classes with an oral briefing concerning food safety in cheese making as we explained to our visitors why we need to wear shoe covers, hair nets, lab coats, and when and how to wash hands and the possibility of contamination should these safety steps not be taken.

***PROTECTION OF CHEESE PRODUCTS IN FACILITY:**

As we are a working facility and manufacturing cheese almost daily, the subject of outside contamination from visitors was addressed. We chose to conduct our classes and tours on Saturdays and not to make cheeses that would require additional draining at room temperature over the weekend. In doing so we reduced the risk of possible contamination as they would have been draining in close proximity to our visitors and could have easily been disturbed. We also did not allow our visitors to roam the plant freely, and kept class size small (3 people or less).

FARM TOURS & CHEESE TASTING BIOSECURITY:

Farm tours at Baetje Farms were conducted in the following order;

*A brief history of Baetje Farms

*Entrance into the foyer of the barn where visitors could observe the goats in their natural environment and ask questions with a supervisor.

- Tour of the milking parlor and milk holding area with a brief discussion of goat husbandry, proper milk handling. They were also able to view the cheese plant through a window.

- All tours concluded with a cheese tasting outside with crackers, plates of cheese, napkins and water available. Cheese was also available for purchase.

- The Farm Tours proved to be more successful than the cheese classes as individuals were not impacting the food safety of our cheese making facility, concluded in under 1.5 hours, and many visitors purchased cheese to take home. As visitors were not directly in contact with the animals and were not inside their immediate living quarters we did not require the shoe covers, hairnets, hand washing or lab coats. The biosecurity for the farm animals was supervised under the watchful eye of the tour guide and the cheese samples were either fully consumed or if there was cheese left over it was given to the participants to take home and enjoy.

NOTES FOR CONSIDERATION:

- When conducting your own on-farm tours, assess the following risks to your animals and environment by asking yourself the following questions:
- Will your tour group be of a manageable size to fit your farm?

- Will your tour operators be able to handle the group or will you need additional help to prevent folks wandering into areas that may be either dangerous to your farm, animals or visitors?
- Will your tour group walk in areas that could pose contamination issues and biosecurity threats? If so you may want to require shoe covers or design a path to reduce the threat of biosecurity.
- Do you have an insurance policy to cover accidents from visitors and financial damage to the farm?