

BALANCING FOOD SAFETY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Opportunities for Co-management – Management Practices in the Agricultural Environment

Resources for food safety auditors about conservation practices in agriculture's production environment.

On their farms, growers are active stewards of the land, protecting soil and water quality as well as supporting wildlife populations by preserving their habitat. At the same time, growers must ensure that their crops are free from contamination by fecal matter, which may introduce pathogens that can cause foodborne illnesses. Balancing these unique management objectives while maintaining a sound bottom line is a central challenge.

[Co-management](#) offers a solution to this challenge. Co-management minimizes the risk of fecal contamination and the resulting microbiological hazards associated with food production while simultaneously conserving soil, water, air, wildlife and other natural resources.

Growers who can communicate their sustainability objectives and auditors who are adequately trained in recognizing key conservation strategies in and adjacent to production fields are better prepared to engage in realistic and frank discussions of co-management strategies as they appear in the production environment.

The following resource sheets contain images and information regarding conservation practices commonly used by growers. These resource sheets discuss individual conservation practices, their purpose and the language growers may use to describe their importance in the production environment, and when audit standards might consider the practices as addressing farming impacts on the environment and/or as potential contributors to food safety risk.

These resource sheets are organized into practices that are found within the production field, and those commonly found adjacent to the production field. They include information on vegetated practices in production fields (cover crops, vegetative barriers, and soil amendments) and vegetated practices adjacent to production fields (critical area plantings, filter strips and grassed waterways; conservation cover and wetland wildlife habitat management; hedgerows, windbreaks and herbaceous wind barriers). They cover vegetated practices near streams and waterbodies (riparian forest buffer and riparian herbaceous cover). Additional resource sheets cover practices to control water (sprinkler and microirrigation; irrigation field ditch, irrigation system tailwater recovery, and surface drainage ditches; irrigation reservoir and structure for water control; constructed wetlands) and sediments (sediment basin and water and sediment basin).

Within each resource sheet are practice descriptions, the potential advantages and disadvantages of these practices in the agricultural environment, and areas within some audit standards that may trigger concerns for assessing impacts on the environment as well as food safety concerns. Scenarios are provided that provide examples of how food safety concerns regarding these practices might be addressed. And access to additional resources for further information is included when available.

These resource sheets for food safety auditors can be accessed through the [UC Food Safety Website](#) under the [Grower link](#). Or you can contact Mary Bianchi, UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor at mlbianchi@ucanr.edu.