

# Center for Agricultural and Rural Sustainability

## Faculty Spotlight

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### Kristen Gibson

Assistant Professor, Department of Food Science

**Project Title:** Enhancing farmers market food safety practices for fresh produce handling

**Project Description:** The number of farmers' markets has greatly increased over the last 20 years driven by the demand for locally grown or raised foods. In recent years, fresh produce is facing increased scrutiny throughout the supply chain, in part, because of the recent Food Safety Modernization Act. Many farmers' market producers are too small to be regulated by FSMA but because of the increasing popularity of farmers markets, food safety at these venues remain an issue. Increasing the complexity of the situation, laws addressing farmers market and food safety vary from state to state and interpretation of those laws vary at the county level, which leads to confusion in knowledge of allowed and recommended practices. This is especially true when it comes to issues such as food sampling, minimally processed foods such as washed and bagged leafy greens and hand washing stations. The knowledge and attitudes towards food safety varies among farmers' managers, vendors and consumers, and their experiences play a role in market practices to address food safety.



Dr. Kristen Gibson teamed up with several project partners to develop this project with the overall goal of improving food safety practices at farmers markets through several objectives that examine perception and knowledge of managers, vendors and consumers with regards to food safety practices and develop educational resources for market managers and customers. Although the project is half way through, they have uncovered some useful information that has impacted the original plan. Gibson's team was originally interested in developing a smartphone app that could help managers and consumers navigate the waters on allowable food safety practices. However, customer surveys indicated that this is something that they were not interested in and probably would not use. As an alternative to the app, they are developing an educational toolbox for farmers markets called *Wholesome and Healthy at the Farmers' Market*. This tool provides information for customers on various produce items and related safe handling

and proper storage as well as other useful tips. They will be beta testing this tool at farmers markets in Northwest Arkansas in the spring as well as select other markets around the country.

**Collaborators:** Kristen has 2 co-PIs at the University of Houston and they are partnering with the National Center for Appropriate Technology, Fayetteville Farmers Market, the Farmers Market Coalition and e-Xtension Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems Community of Practice.

**Project Timeline:** The project was awarded in the fall of 2013 and with a no cost extension will run until 2017.

**Potential for additional funding:** Kristen and her collaborators hope to develop the next phase of the project with Virginia Tech and North Carolina State University, who are working on a similar project addressing food safety issues of farmers market vendors before they leave the farm. The next phase will likely feature a complete food safety package for markets, encompassing education, recommendations, and activities for both at the market and for vendors before they get to the market.

**For more information:** The project website is found [here](#) and Kristen's departmental website can be found [here](#).

**Funding:** Funding for this project came from the USDA NIFA Food Safety Program.



**WHOLESOME  
& HEALTHY**

**AT THE  
FARMERS' MARKET**