

# Audit Demands for Produce Growers/Suppliers

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Foodborne illness linked to contaminated produce has long been known to be a public health concern. So much so that through the Food Safety Modernization Act, (FSMA), the Federal Government has enacted regulation for the “Standards for Growing, Harvesting, Packing, and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption.” This is more commonly known as the “Produce Rule” and concern has been raised that it may pose a challenge for farms that grow produce and sell into retail markets.

While the Produce Rule is the first Federal regulation focusing on microbial food safety at the farm level, in some cases, retailers and distributors are enforcing tougher produce safety rules than required by government regulations. In fact, Peirone Produce Company is one of those cases. Peirone requires annual Third-Party Audits for all produce suppliers. “We feel that it is of the utmost importance to not only our customers, but also to your customers,” says Dale Arneson, Vice President of Peirone Produce Company.

It appears that Peirone Produce and our retail partners are in good company. A report was recently released by the USDA’s Economic Research Service. It showed that major retailers have been requiring Third-Party Audits for approximately the last 20 years. Even though the Produce Rule does not require that farms be audited, and in fact, in some cases, exempts some farms from adhering to the rule, retailers will continue to require the Third-Party Audit in order to have food safety operations independently verified. Here at Peirone Produce, we plan to do the same; “to continue our commitment to you and your customers,” as Dale puts it.

Interestingly, the report highlighted the belief that produce suppliers already being audited won’t be impacted too hard from the Produce Rule as it tends to align with major Third-Party Auditing Schemes already in place. The greatest impact anticipated is to produce growers outside of these established chains (direct-to-consumer sellers, smaller retail suppliers, retailers that do not use established distributors with a Food Safety verification program, and other less traditional sellers). For more retailer insights in the USDA report, click [here](#).

