

Remote PSA Grower Training Delivery Policy: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Courses

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In 2020, the Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) enacted the Temporary Remote Delivery Policy for offering the standardized PSA Grower Training (GT) Course. This policy was a direct response to guidelines from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encouraging social distancing to slow down the spread of SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. The previous PSA policy required that PSA GT Courses were delivered in-person based on input from focus groups with fruit and vegetable growers in 2012 when the PSA Curriculum was being developed. At that time, access to remote technology was much more limited and growers wanted to be able to have their questions asked and answered in real-time, so the growers expressed the desire to have the trainings be only in-person. For this reason, offering PSA GT Courses remotely was established as a temporary option in 2020. From that time, the PSA has been asked to make the policy permanent by many PSA Trainers that felt being able to offer PSA GT Courses remotely helped them better serve and reach fruit and vegetable growers who needed or wanted the training.

This fact sheet highlights the results of an assessment of the remote delivery policy, based on a comparison of evaluation data from PSA GT Course sessions delivered in-person (2019) and remotely (2021). The assessment revealed both benefits and challenges to offering the PSA GT remotely, but there were no significant findings that the remote delivery unilaterally negatively impacted participant learning or training outcomes. In addition, PSA Trainers noted that Remote PSA GT Courses offer the ability to reach more growers in an economically efficient way since it reduced the need to travel, rent facilities, and pay for food/refreshments. Based on this assessment and input from PSA Trainers expressing the continued demand by fruit and vegetable growers for remote training options, the PSA Team has made the remote delivery policy permanent.

Evaluation Analysis of In-person and Remote PSA GT Course Outcomes

A comparison of evaluation data from 16,605 In-person PSA GT Course evaluations in 2019 and 5,506 Remote PSA GT Course evaluations in 2021 largely revealed no significant difference in participant perception of the quality of the course. The following list summarizes the relevant evaluation questions, followed by observations from the data comparison.

The results indicate similar effectiveness and quality between the In-person and Remote PSA GT Course delivery.

1. **This module increased my knowledge:** Most PSA curriculum modules during the In-person PSA GT and Remote PSA GT Courses had no significant difference in knowledge gain. For Modules 2 (Worker Health, Hygiene, and Training), 6 (Postharvest Handling and Sanitation) and 7 (How to Develop a Farm Food Safety Plan), participants' reported confidence in knowledge gained was significantly higher for Remote PSA GT Courses than for In-person PSA GT Courses.
2. **The training was well organized:** 99.2% of the In-person PSA GT Course participants and 99.3% of the Remote PSA GT Course participants agreed.
3. **Level of FSMA Produce Safety Rule (PSR) information was sufficient to implement regulatory requirements:** 96.7% of In-person PSA GT Course participants and 98.9% of Remote PSA GT Course participants agreed.

Recommendations to Overcome Identified Challenges to Remote PSA GT Course Delivery

Challenge: Evaluation data revealed challenges unique to Remote PSA GT Courses. Many participants (12%) had audio/video connectivity issues. In some cases, participants mentioned they worked with organizers for over 30 minutes before audio/video issues were resolved.

Recommendations: Assign at least one person on the training or support team to be available to troubleshoot technical difficulties, such as audio/video issues, with participants. Providing time on the agenda before the course begins to have participants unmute and turn on their video can identify issues early, so that technological issues can be addressed to ensure participants can effectively engage during the entire training.

Challenges: Participants in written evaluation comments mentioned a mismatch between slide numbers in the presentation slides and those listed in the grower manual made it difficult to follow along. Other challenges to following content included a lack of clarity in poll questions and supplemental slides, and not receiving printed course materials on time. Here is one relevant comment: "Some of the poll questions could have been clearer... It would help if acronyms were spelled out as some weren't explained until later in the talk and personally that led to some confusion in trying to answer the question."

Recommendations: Adding supplemental slides to support training is allowed and even encouraged as the FSMA PSR continues to change, however, adding slides alters the slide numbers on screen compared to those listed in the manual. This can be addressed by manually adding a text box with the original slide numbers, so they correlate to the slide numbers in the printed PSA GT Manual. Ensure all poll questions are relevant to the content, including any supplemental slides that are added. Finally, it is a PSA policy that all participants have a PSA GT Manual at the beginning of the course. It is critical that participants be able to follow along with the course content as it is delivered.

Challenge: Attendees mentioned fatigue when they were not given enough break time between modules. Here is one comment: "Breaks should be every 45-50 minutes - people who are used to working outside all day and moving around find it hard to stay focused when they are sitting down and are warm/cool and not moving."

Recommendations: Consider adding more breaks into a Remote PSA GT Course agenda. Paying attention during a remote course is mentally taxing. Many training teams offer the Remote PSA GT Course over two days to break it into shorter days to make each day less demanding. Some training teams add a five-minute break after each module to allow participants to have a short mental and physical break. Others give a longer break every two modules. The point is that participants need the break time, so it should never be skipped.

Challenge: Our analysis of evaluation data indicated that instructor effectiveness was better for in-person courses than for remote courses. This may be due to many factors, but participants also mentioned this in written comments. Here is one paraphrased written comment: Kindly enunciate and pronounce words clearly. Try to speak at a slow pace and check in with us to make sure we understand.

Recommendations: Practice in advance of the training to ensure command of the content and comfort with remote delivery. Check in with the audience every few slides during the presentation to make sure there are no questions and that your pace matches participant needs. Use polls, clicker questions ([here are some examples](#)), and other activities to encourage interaction. PSA Trainers offering remote trainings should consider other ways to enhance their skills and techniques at remote delivery.

The [PSA educators call #52](#)¹ has some useful tips.

Additional Recommendations to Enhance Training Effectiveness

Consider the target audience's level of access to reliable technology and select what mode of delivery best serves your audience's needs. American rural adults and underserved communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) may not have home broadband, smartphones, tablets, or traditional computers ([Pew Research Center](#)², 2021; [Prieger](#)³, 2013). Access to necessary technology is even lower for international agricultural audiences. For example, only 45% of Latin American households have access to broadband creating a huge digital divide ([Wilson Center](#)⁴, 2021). Only use remote delivery when the intended audience has access to the resources and technology necessary to successfully participate.

Remote PSA GT Courses are evaluated by participants through an electronic evaluation. Encourage participants to fill in the electronic evaluation by posting the link in the chat after every module and reminding them of the importance of providing feedback. Evaluations are important for both the training team and for the PSA to gather data to foster better delivery and to inform future

recommendations. There is a high success rate for evaluation return when participants were reminded throughout the training compared to when they were asked to fill out evaluations after the training.

Important Remote PSA GT Course Delivery Details

Remote PSA GT Courses are conducted via a web-based platform in real time, where participants are expected to attend the entire training using devices that have both video and audio such as computers and tablets. The [remote delivery policy](#) allows for a maximum of 30 participants in this delivery mode (compared to a maximum of 50 participants for in-person delivery). The participants are required to have operational video and audio and are required to actively participate throughout the training. In order to receive their Certificate of Completion, participants must attend the entire training. Similar to in-person trainings, remote trainings require at least one PSA Lead Trainer to be present and engaged throughout the course. Whether the delivery is in-person or remote, all PSA Trainers must deliver their modules in real time and not as recorded presentations. The PSA Lead Trainer is responsible for ensuring all PSA policies are followed and completing the necessary course documentation. Additional details about the remote delivery policy can be found on the [PSA website](#).

References

1. Remote Training Delivery Tips. [PSA Educators Call #52](#). Accessed May 2023
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