



## New Multi-Stakeholder Initiative in Produce Industry

### MEDIA RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, DC – A group representing food retailers, growers, NGOs and farm worker organizations has come together to spearhead a new project that aims to improve working conditions, pesticide management and food safety in the produce industry. The Equitable Food Initiative (EFI) is a multi-stakeholder approach to training, certification and verification that advances the interests of workers, growers, retailers, food service companies and consumers alike. The project has been in development since 2009, and is now in the pilot phase on three California farms.

EFI features representation from across the produce industry, including Costco Wholesale, grower Andrew & Williamson, farm worker organizations such as the United Farm Workers, and advocacy groups such as the Consumer Federation of America. All are united in the belief that the EFI's model of labor-management collaboration will result in increased assurance that fresh produce is harvested as safely as possible, in conditions that respect the dignity of workers.

"The goal of EFI is to improve food safety, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility by aligning the interests of consumers, retailers, suppliers, and workers," says Raymond C. Offenheiser, president of Oxfam America, which has been incubating the initiative until EFI incorporates as an independent nonprofit organization. "This win-win approach is designed to improve consumer satisfaction and loyalty, increase profits and wages, and reduce risks."

The program is currently refining its methodology, engaging new stakeholders, and incorporating lessons learned from pilot implementation. Over the coming year EFI will update labor, pesticide and food safety standards, while enhancing training and compliance verification systems that will provide higher levels of assurance to consumers of fresh produce. EFI aims to certify at least 40 farms by the end of 2014, before scaling up rapidly to create the desired level of assurance in the complex domestic and international supply chains of major food service and retail companies.

Arthur D. Jackson, Jr, vice president, General Administration, Costco Wholesale, notes that "safe and wholesome produce begins with dedicated training of, respect for and protection of farm workers. We are honored to join The Equitable Food Initiative on this journey from the farm to the table."

### About the Standards and Training Model

EFI certification of fresh produce operations combines standards for labor, pesticides and food safety, offers facilitation and training to promote worker commitment to compliance, and includes representation from across the value chain in its governance. EFI is currently testing and revising a set of labor, pesticide and food safety standards:

- **EFI Labor standards** cover worker health and safety, freedom of association, fair wages, benefits and conditions of employment, freedom from discrimination and retaliation, dispute settlement, employer-provided housing, and protections for H2A Workers.
- **EFI Pesticide standards** deal with the management of pests, soil, water and habitat. The standards promote an Integrated Pest Management approach to managing crops in order to minimize the use of highly hazardous pesticides. EFI requires full pesticide use reporting and includes quantification of pesticide risks to workers and the environment.
- **EFI Food Safety standards** address worker hygiene, water use, soil amendments, land use, animals, harvest, and post-harvest activities.

EFI has piloted a training curriculum to help companies meet or exceed EFI's standards by training farm workers and growers to collaborate and improve assurance processes. EFI's approach creates an on-farm labor-management Leadership Team, and an incentive (improved working conditions assured by the standards) through which farm workers collaborate with management to identify and address threats to food safety and social accountability on a continuous basis. EFI is also developing a database and reporting system to allow for real-time updates on compliance with the standards and support to continuous improvement processes.

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#### Current members of the EFI

- Andrew and Williamson Fresh Produce International
- Bon Appétit Management Company
- Calvert Investments
- Center for Science in the Public Interest
- Consumer Federation of America
- Costco Wholesale Corporation
- Farmworker Justice
- Farm Labor Organizing Committee
- National Farm Worker Ministry
- Oxfam America
- Pesticide Action Network North America
- Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste
- United Farm Workers

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