

Equitable Food Initiative Continues to Drive Workforce Development Priorities

Offered Education and Resources to Guide Industry in Social Responsibility in 2021

WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, UNITED STATES, December 20, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Despite ongoing challenges presented by the COVID pandemic, 2021 was a year of progress for [Equitable Food Initiative](#) as it drew strength from its multistakeholder approach, bringing new insights from retail partners, produce growers, workers and consumers to share with the industry in the form of education program and digital resources.



Produce & Reduce Team meeting at Misionero

Over the past year, EFI launched a four-part webinar series on social responsibility in partnership with The Packer, provided a downloadable social media toolkit for Farmworker Awareness Week,

released a [Responsible Recruitment Scorecard](#) for employers to assess forced labor risk and provided thought leadership to the fresh produce industry and consumers via monthly newsletters. It also created a Marketing Advisory Council plus a leadership team committee of workers and managers from its certified farms to add new voices to EFI's thought leadership on labor solutions.

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Peter O'Driscoll, Executive Director, EFI

EFI placed new emphasis on digital resources and education yielding excellent results, including more than

250,000 impressions and more than 500 direct consumer engagements. The organization's Farmworker Awareness Week Communications Toolkit was downloaded hundreds of times, and more than 100 organizations participated in the campaign, sharing content with a social reach of

more than 100,000 consumers during the weeklong event. EFI's free Responsible Recruitment Scorecard has been accessed by more than 30 organizations seeking to avoid trafficked labor in their workforce.

EFI is committed to providing the entire produce industry with tools and resources to undertake a continuous improvement journey toward better labor practices, but its core identity is still as a skill-building and certification organization. After engaging 16 new

farming operations this year, EFI now works with 29 grower-shipper companies on 75 farms, with 49 certifications completed and 26 more in progress. Through the EFI program, nearly 4,000 farmworkers and managers (of which nearly 40% are women) have been trained in problem-solving and communications practices that are raising labor, food safety and pest management standards for more than 57,000 workers. Nearly \$3 million in worker bonuses were generated this past year by participating retailers, bringing the program total to nearly \$13 million.

Thanks to EFI's leadership in education and training, organizations throughout the United States are taking notice of its strong certification standards. EFI was named as one of Walmart's qualified certifying organizations for the new pollinator health commitment program, and Whole Foods Market brought its first EFI-certified product into the Sourced for Good program with GoodFarms' strawberries. EFI has also received several significant grants, including ones from the Walmart Foundation and the California Workforce Development Board, to help EFI advance research and programming related to responsible recruitment, labor practices and sustainability.

"Like many organizations, the pandemic forced EFI to rethink our strategy and priorities," said Peter O'Driscoll, executive director for EFI. "We are committed to improving the lives of farmworkers by helping employers stay ahead of the labor shortage while meeting the quality and fulfillment requirements of their major retail customers. We've learned a lot about remote training, employer self-assessment and farmworker feedback processes that have positioned EFI for growth in 2022 and beyond. We look forward to working with partners across the industry to keep raising the bar on labor practices, food safety and sustainability."

EFI has a variety of workforce development tools, training modules and educational resources that grower-shippers can access online at equitablefood.org/resources. To learn more about EFI certification programming, contact Kevin Boyle at business@equitablefood.org.

About EFI



Worker-manager collaborative team from a GoodFarms location in Mexico received training from Equitable Food Initiative

Equitable Food Initiative is a nonprofit certification and skill-building organization that seeks to increase transparency in the food supply chain and improve the lives of farmworkers through a team-based approach to training and continuous improvement practices. EFI brings together growers, farmworkers, retailers and consumers to solve the most pressing issues facing the fresh produce industry. Its unparalleled approach sets standards for labor practices, food safety and pest management while engaging workers at all levels on the farm to produce Responsibly Grown, Farmworker Assured® fruits and vegetables. For more information about Equitable Food Initiative, visit equitablefood.org.

View a list of EFI-certified farms at equitablefood.org/farms.

LeAnne Ruzzamenti
Equitable Food Initiative
+1 2025240540

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