



# Investing in People

## F & S Produce uses grant for company-wide training

By Kathy Gibbons  
Editorial director

**With a new 25,000-square-foot facility expansion now in place, F & S Produce is investing in another valuable asset: its 400-plus employees.**

The Rosenhayn, N.J.-based fresh-cut processor, working with nearby Gloucester County College, recently obtained a \$324,800 training grant through the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The money is being used to craft a curriculum that President and COO Lou Cooperhouse said is designed to infuse staff at all levels with a thorough understanding and knowledge of food safety and good manufacturing practices (GMP).

"It's one thing for management to understand HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), but at the line-worker level, to have a good understanding of how important food safety is and good manufacturing practices, I think it just puts it really deep in their mind that your job versus working at a fast food chain or some other operation — this is a very important job," Cooperhouse said. "It's something that is top down. We're really integrating it throughout the whole company."

### Partnering with college

Offering a two-year food science degree that articulates to a four-year program with Rutgers University to make it more affordable and streamlined to get a bachelor's in food science, Gloucester is positioned to support F&S in its training needs.

Patricia Claghorn, the college's dean for business studies and continuing education, noted that the college had received an earlier grant to develop its food science curriculum and supporting safety training programs.

So after F&S hired a consultant to help clarify its training needs, it looked to the college for



F & S Produce in Rosenhayn, N.J., recently completed a 25,000-square-foot expansion. Now it's focusing on employee training. *Photos by Kathy Gibbons.*

support in administering and implementing the training program. For Gloucester, which provides customized curriculum for processors in and outside of the food industry, it wasn't new territory.

"They tell us what they need and we go forward from there," Claghorn said.

One thing F&S needed was training in information technology specific to a new system they had just implemented.

"We purchased an upgraded software system that's totally integrated with all of our production manufacturing systems, but it's only going to work if people are trained," Cooperhouse said. "Through the grant, we can pay for the cost of the training, so line workers and line leaders can be properly trained."





With a \$324,800 training grant, F & S will be providing specialized training to its entire workforce. That includes GMP instruction to about 300 production workers, in English and Spanish. At right, F & S CEO Sam Pipitone, Jr., left, and President and COO Lou Cooperhouse.

## Spanish essential

The company also wanted HACCP training for 25 more employees beyond the 10 who currently have it — and not just in English. In response, the college identified a food scientist at Pennsylvania State University who could teach in Spanish.

“Many of us in the fresh-cut industry across the country have a very strong Spanish-speaking workforce,” Cooperhouse said. “So (it was important) to actually have that done in Spanish by a trained food scientist who really can go quite deep in understanding why we do things a certain way, why all these elements are so critical.

“Because at the end of the day, we’re making product for consumers. We want to be sure that product is safe, wholesome and consistent every time.”

In addition, F&S desired to provide GMP training to about 300 production workers — also in Spanish.

“The GMP training is eight hours over a period of six months,” Cooperhouse said, noting that employees will learn about hygiene, sanitation, food pathogens, preventive measures, etc. “We have not been able to do it at this level before now. Eight hours of training is extensive for any company.”

On top of that, 25 managers are to receive instruction in lean manufacturing, a philosophy based

on identifying efficiencies and reducing wasteful steps. And drivers for the company’s in-house trucking company will also participate in a program geared for them — “everything from communication skills to proper refrigeration control to driver safety,” Cooperhouse said.

## Online training

For Gloucester, working with the specific needs of a fresh-cut operation like F&S only expands what they’re able to offer in terms of food safety training.

The college is in the process of developing a website that will offer online food safety courses along with a corresponding management system that employers can use to track and document employee training. Curriculum areas include GMP, allergen awareness, personal safety and food service manager refresher, with more to come.

“F&S will contribute to a couple of the new courses we’re thinking of,” said Allen Magid, Gloucester’s sales manager for continuing education and customized training. “We’re looking for guidance from F&S, and the New Jersey Food Processors Association, to see what kind of courses are needed at least in their industry, then we’ll look around at what’s needed throughout the United States.” ■

**“At the end of the day, we’re making product for consumers. We want to be sure that product is safe, wholesome and consistent every time.”**

— Lou Cooperhouse,  
F & S Produce