

# Good Agricultural Practices Training for Master Gardener Volunteers Donating Produce



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

EXTENSION

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## INTRODUCTION OF NEED

Ohio State University Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) work in community and school gardens to grow and donate produce within their communities (Image 1). The College of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University adopted a policy in 2023 requiring anyone participating in university-affiliated gardens and farms to complete a Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) Training if produce from those endeavors is donated for consumption. This includes MGV-led projects.

This policy emphasized a statewide need for volunteer-focused GAPs training to ensure MGVs could continue growing, harvesting, and donating produce to address local needs.



Image 1: One of the many community gardens that Master Gardeners lead, manage, or collaborate with across Ohio.

## GAPs FOR MGVs PROGRAM

GAPs training materials were developed for the OSU Extension MGV program. Training materials included a GAPs addendum to the vegetable chapter of the MGV training manual and a GAPs training presentation (Figure 1). These materials provide produce safety education and awareness to MGVs growing and donating produce. The training was available in-person and as a webinar recording. Volunteers were also permitted to take a more in-depth GAPs online course, which covered these topics and more from garden to farm-scale production.

### MGVs GAPs Training Program Materials

Program Agenda
Food Safety Concerns in Fresh Produce
Ohio State University Policy Requirements
Land Use Assessment
Safe Soil Amendments and Composting
Clean Water for Intended Uses
Clean Hands and Volunteer Hygiene
Animals in the Garden
Clean Tools
Strategies for Implementing and Working with Partners

Figure 1. The Master Gardener GAPs training program adapts national good agricultural practices for small home gardens, school gardens, and community garden spaces. Components of the GAPs training for MGVs included information in the Ohio MGV Training Manual and a PowerPoint presentation delivered in person or via a recording.

## PROGRAM GOALS

Program goals focused on four priorities:

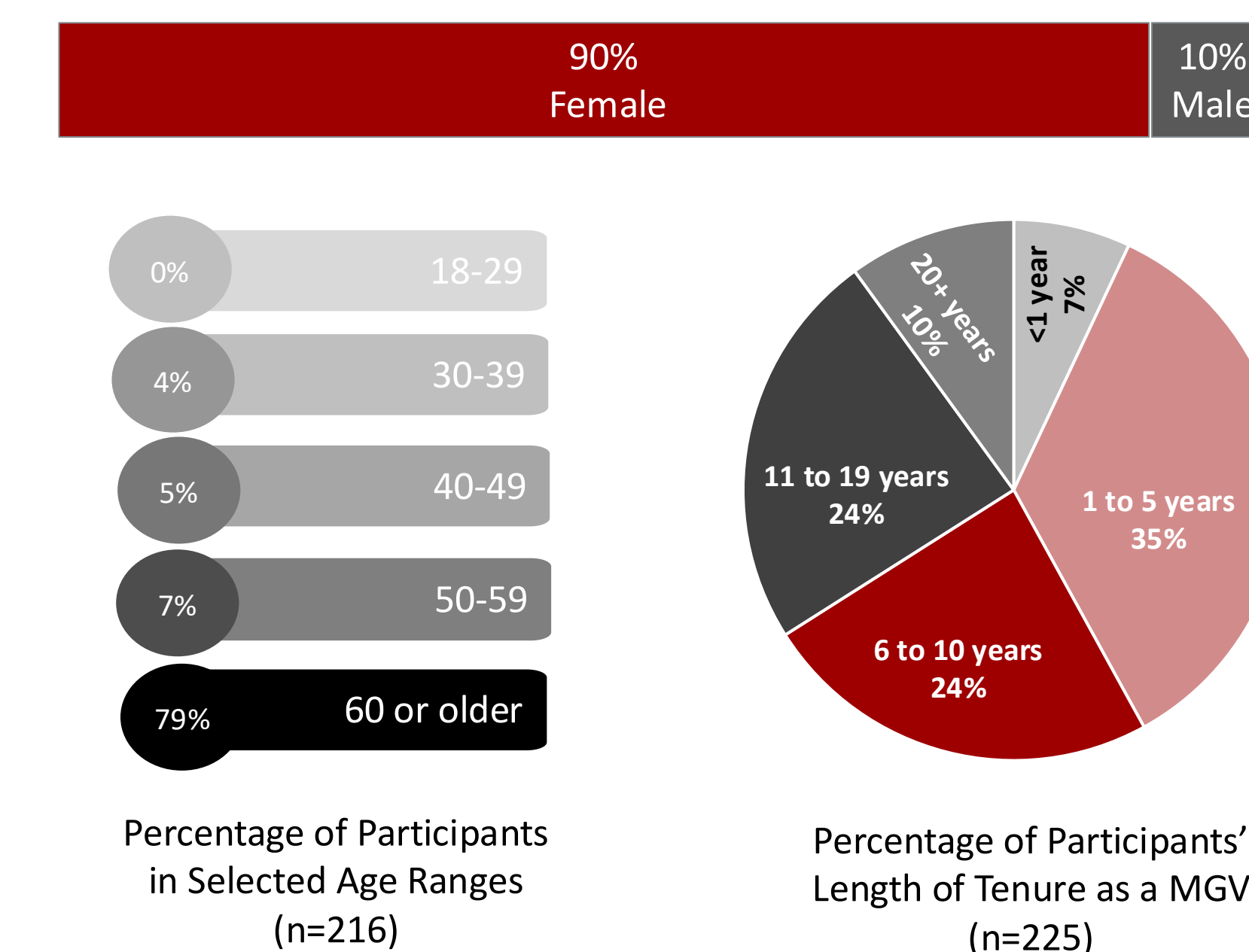
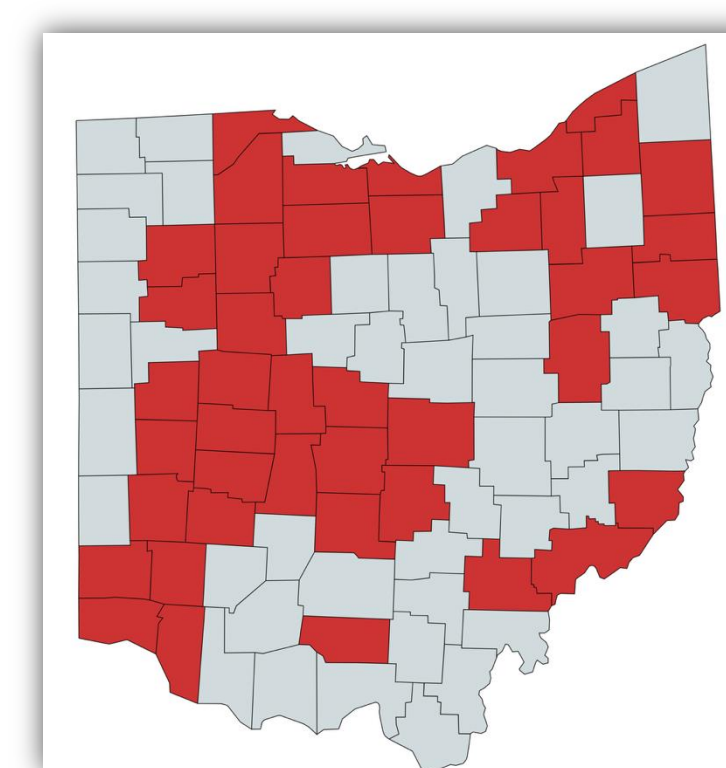
- Equip volunteers with practical food safety knowledge tailored to small-scale donation gardens.
- Strengthen food safety practices among volunteers working in school and community garden spaces.
- Expand access to produce safety resources for volunteers in Ohio and abroad.
- Ensure the continued ability for OSU volunteers to donate produce to the needy.

## SURVEY

MGVs who completed the GAPs training were asked to participate in a retrospective pre-then-post evaluation. The survey asked participants to rate their perceived knowledge level on key GAPs topics before and after the training. In addition to demographic data, the survey asked participants how they received GAPs training, their intent to change food safety practices, where information learned will be implemented, key challenges facing garden projects, and topics for additional food safety training.

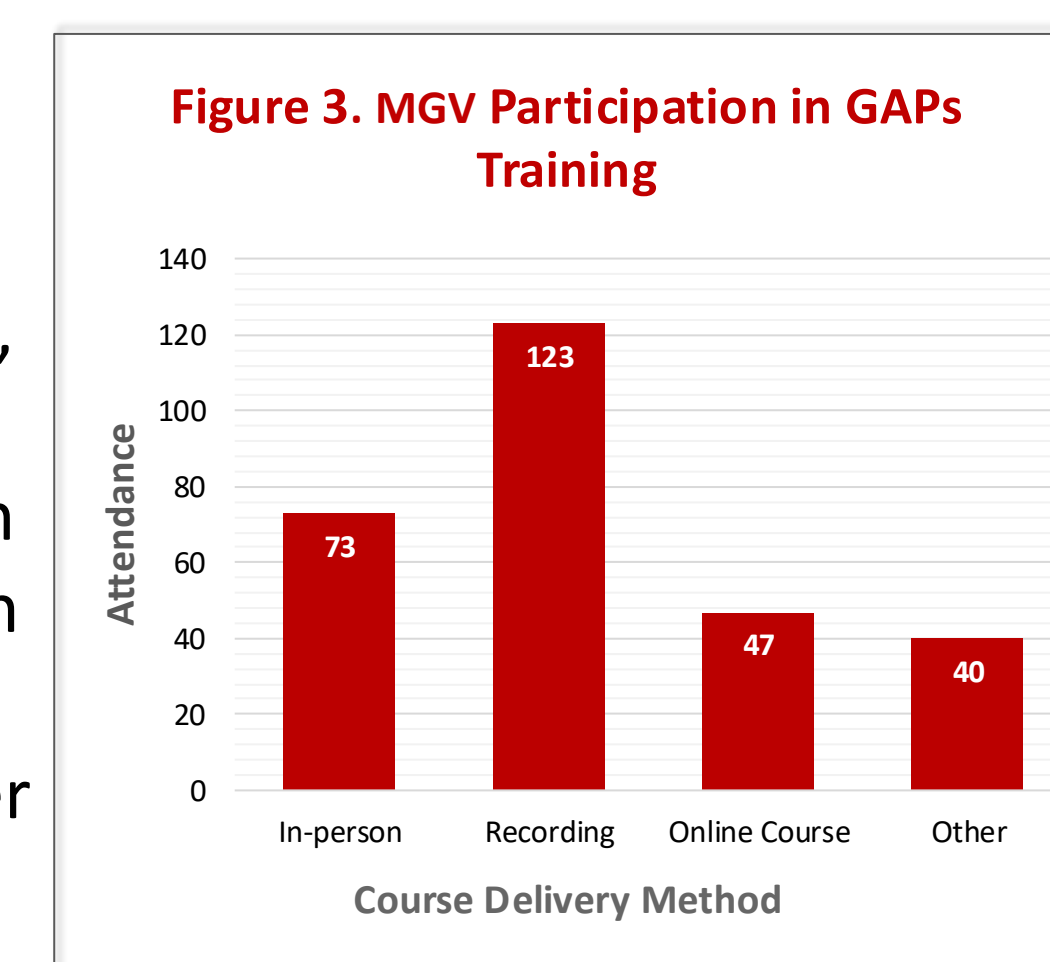
### Participant Characteristics

Figure 2. A total of 282 MGVs completed the survey from 43 of Ohio's 88 counties (shaded red). Participants were overwhelmingly female (n=221) with the majority being 60 years of age or older and having five or more years of service as an MGV.



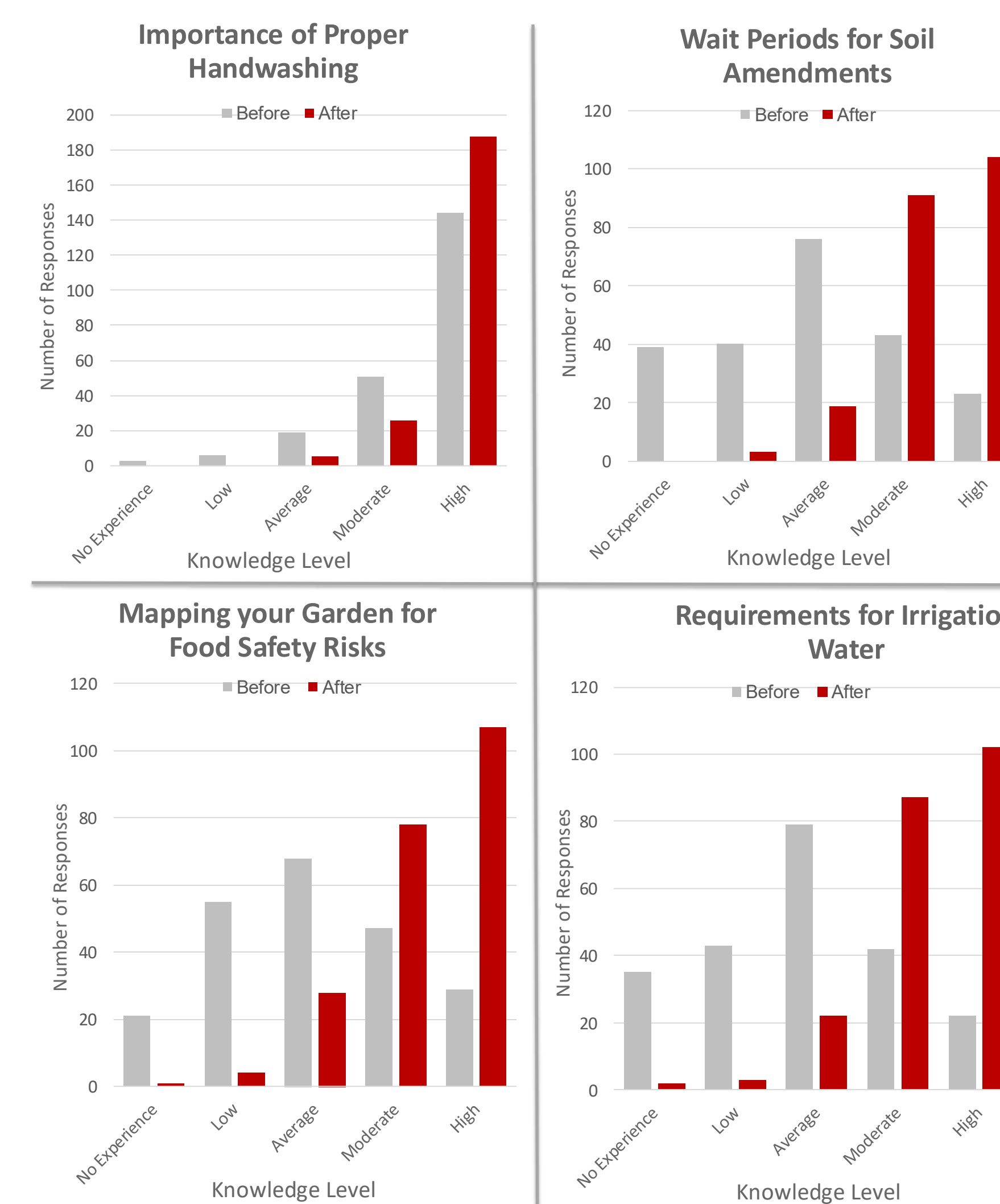
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The majority of participants (44%) received the GAPs training by watching the recorded program, followed by 26% attending an in-person training, 17% taking an online GAPs course, and 14% through other means.

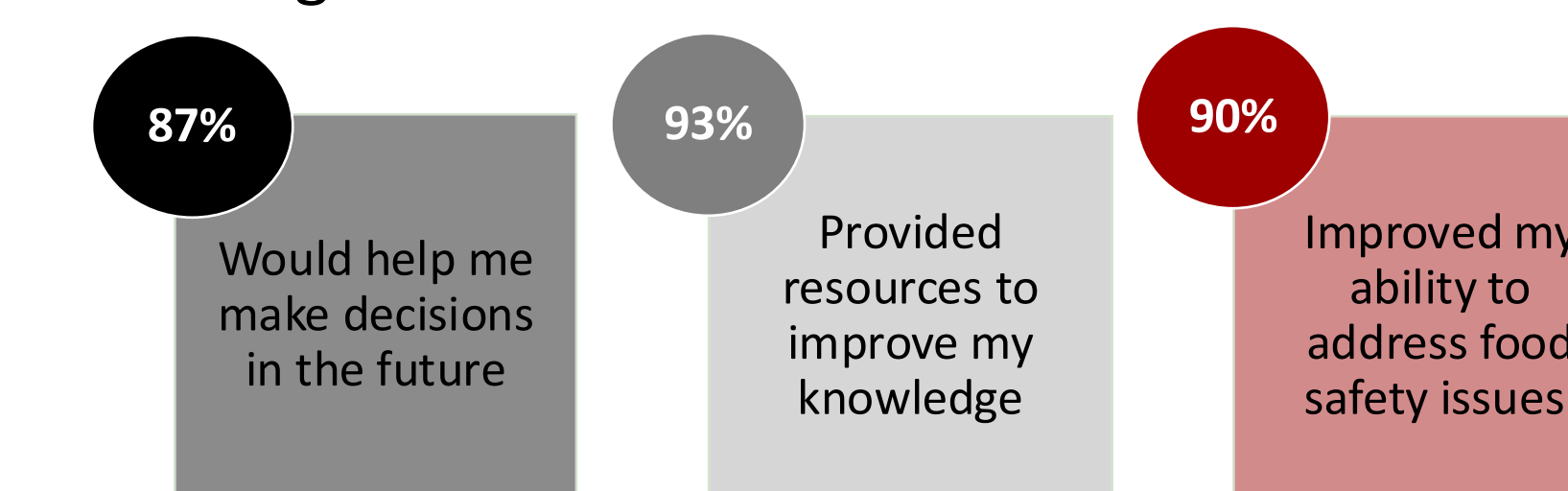


Self-reported knowledge levels about all topics surveyed increased (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Sample of survey responses where participants rated their knowledge level of food safety topics from BEFORE and AFTER attending a GAPs training.



The majority of participants indicated that the GAPs training:



## FUTURE EFFORTS AND IMPACTS

Ninety-three percent of participants reported they intended to identify food safety risks in the garden. Participants indicated that the knowledge gained would be implemented in a variety of garden spaces, including their own gardens.



## CONCLUSIONS

The training increased attendees' reported knowledge levels on GAPs in the garden. Participants indicated that they intended to use the information; the question remaining is whether this information was used, and whether the information was helpful in practice. Follow-up surveys may be warranted to assess needed additions to the curriculum.

Preliminary results show the training increased awareness of food safety risks, increased volunteer knowledge around best practices, and identified additional topics for training and resource development. The training helped ensure over 161,000 lbs. of produce was able to be donated to local food banks in 2025.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of OSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteer program and Master Gardener Volunteers who provide unbiased research-based home horticulture information to the public.

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