



# Worker Engagement Drives Positive Outcomes for the Fresh Produce Industry

## Impact Evaluation Report



Executive Summary of Impact Analysis by BSD Consulting

## Background & Methodology

Equitable Food Initiative (EFI) retained BSD Consulting to conduct a two-year study that assessed the impacts of the EFI Program as defined by its Theory of Change:

*If the workforce is properly trained and incentivized to collaborate with management in developing a safe, stable and dignified working environment, then new value is created for growers and buyers.*

## Study Design

The study was designed with a holistic approach to evaluate the impact of EFI on certified farms and include the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Over the course of two years (2017–2018), both quantitative and qualitative data were used to construct a comprehensive assessment of changes brought about through implementation of the EFI Program.



**19**

Farm Visits



**476**

Interviews



**21**

Focus Groups



**81**

Audit Report Analyses



“The impact of the EFI Leadership Team training on personal and professional growth is amazing to watch. Many of our workers started the weeklong training timid and unsure. They remained quiet and were hesitant to make eye contact. By the end of the 40-hour training, they were excited about the work, participating in dialogue and eager to show everyone what they had learned. It was wonderful to be part of something that created lifelong change for members of our team.”

**Kristin Kershaw, Domex Superfresh Growers**

# EFI Program Outcomes



The EFI Program creates unprecedented change in farming operations across the Americas. The five defined areas of impact create positive outcomes at the individual, organizational and societal levels. The model effectively brings collaboration and transparency to the fresh produce supply chain.

## POSITIVE OUTCOMES RESULT FROM ENGAGING WORKERS

EFI's unparalleled approach in the fresh produce industry creates a worker engagement model that leads to a variety of positive outcomes that intersect and reinforce one another.

An investment in developing workers' soft skills and the systems to engage them leads to advances in organizational culture and management systems.



## EFI's Alignment to the Ethical Charter on Responsible Labor Practices

EFI is well-positioned to help leading produce suppliers demonstrate their compliance with the Ethical Charter on Responsible Labor Practices as evidenced in the outcome areas defined throughout this report. The Ethical Charter specifically calls for labor-management communication, worker protections and management systems for continuous improvement – each of which is strongly present in the EFI Program and affirmed by the third-party research of BSD Consulting. The following table highlights ways the EFI Program addresses key principles of the Ethical Charter:



Ethical Charter Principles	EFI Program Research Findings
Workers have the right and responsibility to voice questions, report in good faith any improper or wrongful activity or to discuss opportunities and/or grievances.	EFI training and Leadership Team activities build trust and openness and provide a space for workers to discuss concerns and ideas.
A fair, transparent and accessible channel of communication should exist to provide input to management and to resolve workplace issues.	The cross-level, cross-departmental EFI Leadership Teams gather input and issues from the workforce and serve as a space for worker engagement, trust-building and innovation.
Employers should encourage timely disclosure of concerns and shall prohibit retaliation against anyone who, in good faith, reports concerns.	On EFI-certified farms, there is a heightened willingness to bring attention to issues without fear on the part of farmworkers and with a feeling of gratitude for doing so on the part of supervisors.
Employers commit to integrating sound management systems (such as policies, processes, education and training, documentation, communication and feedback channels) that sustain and demonstrate compliance with applicable labor, employment, occupational health and safety laws governing the employer.	Effective EFI Leadership Teams lead to greater awareness of issues, deeper information to address the issues, strengthened management systems and faster response times.
Employers should look to these systems to continuously improve performance against compliance objectives.	Workers and managers on EFI-certified farms are engaging in continuous improvement, monitoring and innovation.



## OUTCOME AREA: Skill Development

EFI's workforce development facilitators provide a minimum of 40 hours of training to Leadership Teams on effective problem-solving processes, data gathering, communication and conflict resolution. Facilitators use a popular education model for the training, which provides transformative and relevant experiences. It is often the first training or professional development opportunity farmworkers have experienced.

The soft skills taught as part of the EFI training – including listening, brainstorming and empathy – shift the way workers and managers approach one another and ultimately lead to collaborative work environments.



**The EFI Leadership Team training develops mindsets, attitudes, behaviors and capacities for effective leadership, teamwork and problem-solving.**

### DEVELOPED SKILLS MOST OFTEN CITED BY EFI-TRAINED WORKERS AND MANAGERS

- Self-Confidence and Agency** ➤ Increased confidence in abilities evolves to a sense of agency with the capacity and desire to collaborate as a team.
- Empathy and Active Listening** ➤ Active listening and the capacity to share, understand and respect another's perspective changes management approaches and the work environment.
- Communication** ➤ Ability and opportunities for communication increase, and enhanced skills allow for effective worker engagement.
- Teamwork and Problem-Solving** ➤ Leadership Team members collaborate to identify issues and root causes, brainstorm solutions, assess situations and define plans.



"I see situations with a different perspective now. More aware of safety issues and with a better understanding. I have lost fear to express myself in front of my coworkers, and I communicate better with them now. I have a responsibility to bring information to them and to listen. We are a lot closer now."

**Male Farmworker**

## OUTCOME AREA:

# Organizational Culture Shifts

The EFI Program advances profound self-reinforcing culture shifts in grower organizations, leading to a collaborative and respectful work environment, an engaged workforce and stronger relationships based on effective communication, trust and transparency.



As a deeper understanding and value is placed on worker rights, trust and transparency are fostered. Meanwhile, participation in EFI Leadership Teams strengthens interpersonal relationships. Both workers and managers cite the removal of fears and language barriers and report new engagement from workers who are encouraged to speak up to share problems and ideas.

These outcomes of the EFI Program – increased trust, transparency, more effective communication and interpersonal relationships – allow a collaborative and respectful work environment to flourish. Both managers and workers have an increased sense of belonging and commitment to the organization. There is a shared purpose, and the “us versus them” mentality is replaced with a continuous improvement approach.



**Managers and workers across all departments and levels cite improvements in communication, which lead to greater accountability and continuous improvement.**



**EFI encourages worker engagement and defines spaces for representation and participation that build trust.**



“We are no longer afraid to speak. There was no communication before. Now things get seen, and people speak directly to EFI Leadership Team members, in their language, with people they trust. But most importantly, the issues get solved.”

**Female Farmworker**

## OUTCOME AREA:

# Integrated and Strengthened Management Systems

Growers in the EFI Program report improvements in their management systems, performance indicators and organizational culture and cite the following examples:

- Managers can act sooner and with a deeper understanding of challenges and possibilities enriched by worker input and perspectives.
- Managers recognize the importance of learning more about other areas of the operation and begin making links across different practices and disciplines.
- Because departmental managers are all in the same room (often for the first time), they create a more integrated management approach from their previously fragmented systems.
- Areas are identified where formal procedures are absent but needed, and robust policies and processes are put in place.
- Meeting standards for working conditions, food safety and pest management become shared goals among all areas of the organization, not resting responsibility on one person or department.
- Worker representatives have the opportunity to enrich and discuss improvement plans with management, peers and supervisors.
- Ownership by workers across levels and departments increases around crucial issues. Systems improve, and risks are reduced.
- Issues that have been pending, or have been identified but not solved, are being handled with quicker response times by EFI Leadership Teams.



**Silos are broken down, and managers recognize the importance of learning about other areas and making links across the organization.**



“We have had systems for quality and food safety management for a long time. The difference in EFI has been marked by worker engagement. How to do it better? EFI focuses on that through more knowledge, more engagement and better risk management.”

**Manager**

## OUTCOME AREA:

# Improved Working Conditions

The EFI model creates systems-level change that improves working conditions through a variety of factors. In addition to the cultural shifts around trust, communication and collaboration, overall working conditions are improved as Leadership Teams address specific issues. Corrective action plans, created during third-party audits of EFI Standards, direct more attention and resources to improving conditions and preventing workplace incidents.

### WORKING CONDITIONS IMPROVE THROUGH:



### EFI Enhances Protection Against Discrimination & Sexual Harassment

Women, members of ethnic groups and elderly workers appreciate the respect that has been cemented among workers, supervisors and managers. Study respondents report a working environment where derogatory terms are increasingly uncommon, and everyone thinks twice before reinforcing discriminatory attitudes.

“We started to see safety, security and health improvements, people began to have work tools... There was no drinking water, the quality was very poor and now it's fit for drinking, and the fumigators now receive special drinking solutions for dehydration.”

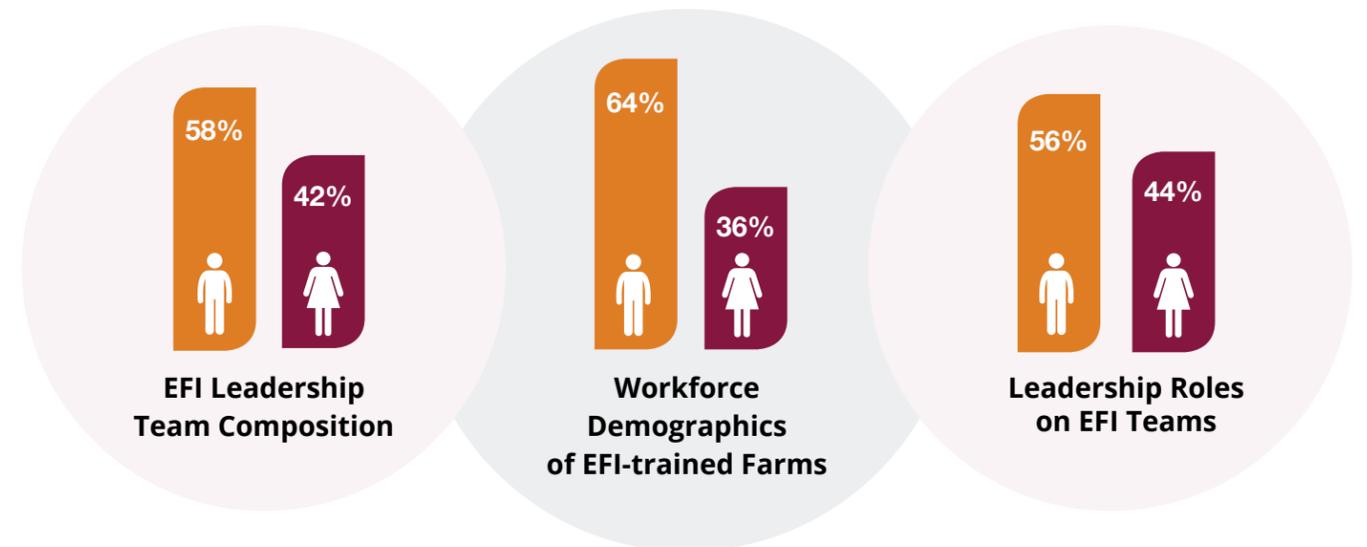
**Prisca Tejeda Cuevas, Harvester**



“Before I didn't dare to speak up. Now I can, without being afraid. I don't feel embarrassed any more. I didn't have confidence in myself, but I learned from the trainings. The [EFI Leadership Team] gives me the opportunity to grow and take on more challenges. When we first arrived from Veracruz I felt strange. We speak a dialect and Spanish. In the committee, I started getting to know my coworkers – we felt welcome.”

**Male Farmworker**

### WOMEN ARE WELL-REPRESENTED ON EFI LEADERSHIP TEAMS



Women are experiencing a greater sense of respect and feel safer and better supported by management. The sense of inclusiveness goes beyond gender and applies also to minority groups, who experience less discrimination based on language and ethnicity. Women are also well-represented on EFI Leadership Teams, helping ensure issues specific to them are voiced and addressed.



**Investing in workers helps attract and retain the best talent, improve motivation and productivity and strengthen the organization's ability to innovate.**



**OUTCOME AREA:**

# Improved Organizational Performance

When the EFI Program is introduced to farming operations, the goal is to create a commitment to continuous improvement and lean management that leads to innovation and improved organizational performance.



## EFI CREATES A PATH TO INNOVATION AND IMPROVED ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE



**The innovative bet on developing human competencies to drive worker engagement is paying off, as growers affirm improvements in their managing systems, organizational cultures and performance indicators.**



“EFI has helped us maximize our efficiencies in all aspects of our program and work areas. The EFI model gave workers a voice and a way to share their ideas and helped us work together to implement improvements, taking an efficient operation and making it even better.”

**Shawn Hartley, Owner and Vice President, Onions 52**



“The staff feel more empowered, more engaged in our business and that their voices matter. This has led to a tremendous amount of improvements in our business based on their feedback on simple things but that wouldn’t have been obvious to us unless they brought them forward.”

**Kevin Doran, CEO, Houweling’s Group**



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