



**ECIP**

## Ethical Charter Implementation Program

**2025 Annual Report:**  
November 2024 - December 2025

# The ECIP Advisory Group





Dear Fresh Produce Industry Members,

As the Advisory Group guiding development of the Ethical Charter Implementation Program (ECIP), the undersigned companies are pleased to support this effort to deliver real value and drive meaningful progress on responsible labor practices in the fresh produce industry.

ECIP is strengthening our industry's social responsibility through field-level implementation of the Ethical Charter on Responsible Labor Practices, which was adopted in 2018 to guide the management of agricultural labor in the production of fresh produce.

Intended to complement—not replace—existing social responsibility programs, ECIP aligns the industry around shared principles and provides a practical starting point for continuous improvement. By emphasizing learning and incremental progress, the program creates space for suppliers and growers to engage meaningfully in moving the industry forward. Through 2025, momentum is building: participation is expanding, engagement is deepening, and ECIP is becoming embedded within the produce industry's approach to responsible labor practices.

Our commitment to this work remains strong. As an Advisory Group, we are encouraged by the growing engagement and dedication of suppliers and growers across the produce supply chain. ECIP is proving to be a vitally important tool for advancing and improving social responsibility efforts throughout the industry.

This report shares insights from a variety of suppliers and growers, along with aggregated data gathered from the ECIP LAB platform during the program's second year. Equitable Food Initiative, which developed and manages ECIP, is solely responsible for the content of this report.

Building on our shared goal of expanding the reach of ECIP tools, we look forward to new program developments in 2026 that will provide more evidence of the produce industry's progress toward meaningful implementation of the Ethical Charter.

We sincerely appreciate your dedication as retailers, suppliers and growers to pursuing improvements that elevate the fresh produce industry for all the essential workers on whom we depend.

Gratefully,

The ECIP Advisory Group

## 2025 ANNUAL REPORT:

# Produce Industry Embracing ECIP

Launched in 2023, the Ethical Charter Implementation Program (ECIP) is a collaboration among retailers, suppliers and growers to recognize and strengthen engagement around labor practices in the fresh produce industry, to highlight existing best-practice efforts, and to identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

ECIP is supporting the produce industry's commitment to the 2018 Ethical Charter on Responsible Labor Practices through online platforms that help suppliers and growers learn about labor management systems, assess the strength of their own systems and benchmark their progress on workforce and supply chain management.

In 2025, ECIP updated the Learn, Assess and Benchmark (LAB) platform, and experienced a significant increase in participation. By the end of December, 325 suppliers and 1,770 growers had subscribed. The program is scaling at a pace that signals durable industry adoption.



## Engagement 2.0: A Platform Update

Grower LAB forms the foundation of ECIP by breaking the principles of the Ethical Charter into 54 labor management systems and providing resources and guidance on how to integrate and strengthen each of them. Grower LAB is designed to meet any operation where it is on the journey toward alignment with the Ethical Charter. Users are encouraged to honestly assess their labor management systems, understanding that their responses are not shared with their customers, and that they are rewarded for engagement rather than compliance. By establishing an accurate baseline, growers can track their improvement over time.

Supplier LAB aggregates the engagement data of all the growers from which a supplier sources product, and provides an overview of how the sourcing network is integrating Ethical Charter principles, and where it might need additional support. The self-assessment invites suppliers to consider steps they can take to reinforce the importance of responsible labor practices, and optimizes supply chain management to reduce workforce risk.

In July 2025, ECIP introduced significant platform updates called Engagement 2.0, with a reframed grower assessment, new questions for suppliers and stronger emphasis on repeat participation and sustained progress. As a means of tracking engagement, both suppliers and growers earn stars in their online profiles as they use the respective LAB platforms. Suppliers improve their engagement profile as they better align with the Ethical Charter by addressing their own management systems and supporting their growers in strengthening theirs.

Though the new Engagement 2.0 thresholds are more rigorous, requiring suppliers and growers to update their assessments, renewal rates remained strong, signaling that users are committed to ECIP even as expectations increased.

**New and revised questions within the grower assessment placed greater emphasis on:**

- ✔ Management systems and continuous improvement
- ✔ Worker protections and communication
- ✔ Evidence-based implementation

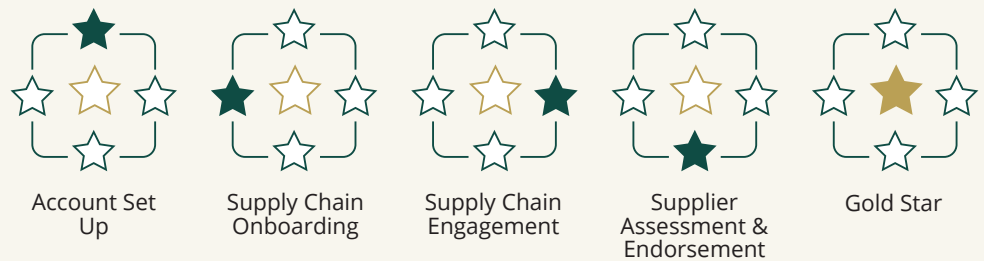
**How Suppliers Earn Stars**



**How Growers Earn Stars**



**SUPPLIER ENGAGEMENT PROFILE**



**GROWER ENGAGEMENT PROFILE**



## ECIP Program Milestones

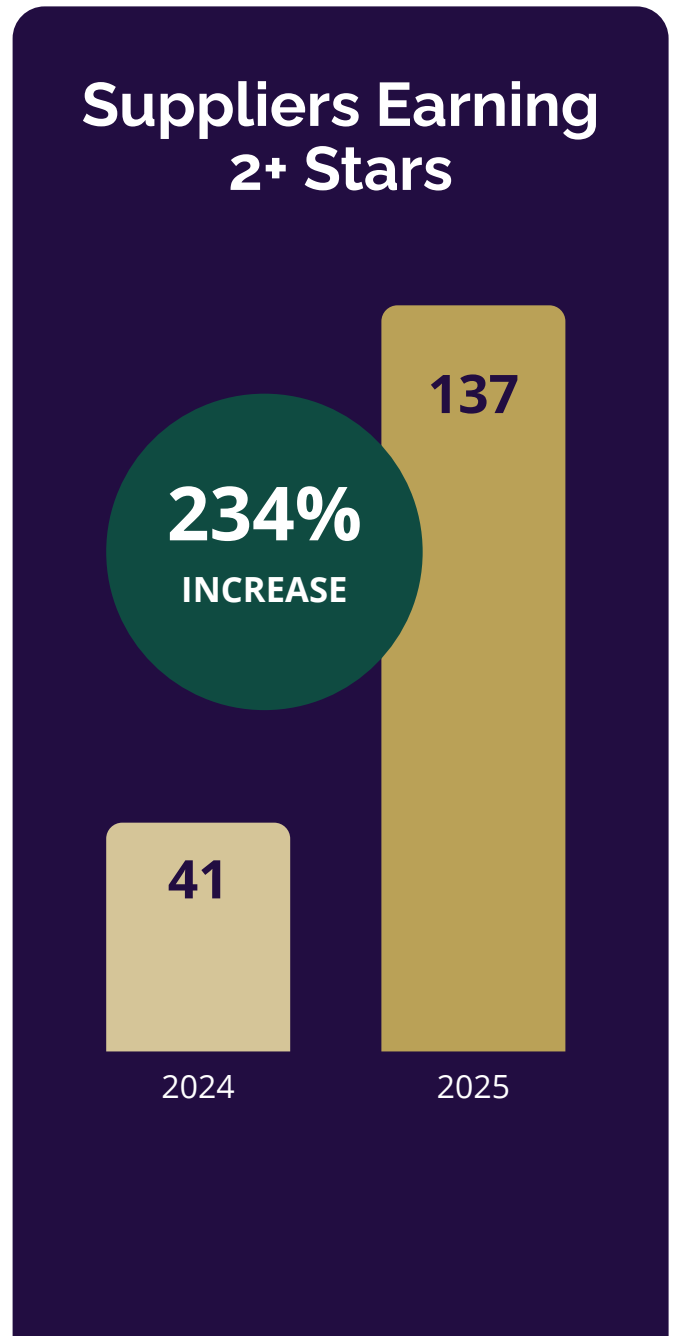
Each milestone in the timeline below reflects the program’s focus on incremental learning, assessment and continuous improvement across the produce supply chain.



## Suppliers

### Supplier Performance

The number of suppliers earning two or more engagement stars increased from **41** in 2024 to **137** in 2025, a **234%** increase following Engagement 2.0 platform updates. This dramatic growth is a clear indication of deeper engagement by suppliers.



## Supplier Areas of Strength

Aggregated supplier responses show their strongest performance was in the following areas:

### ■ Structured Assessment & Support of Grower Networks

Suppliers are increasingly formalizing how they assess and support their growers, moving from informal oversight to documented and regular review processes. This change reflects a shift toward proactive risk management rather than reactive enforcement.

### ■ Fair and Transparent Contracting Practices

Strong performance in contracting-related questions suggests that suppliers are broadly implementing clear, consistent and documented commercial agreements, an essential foundation for predictable labor expectations across supply chains.

### ■ Defined Internal Accountability

Most suppliers demonstrate clearly assigned roles and accountabilities for social responsibility functions. The presence of named staff, documented oversight processes and internal ownership structures signals maturing governance systems.

## Supplier Areas for Improvement

Aggregated supplier responses also reveal three areas where additional support is needed:

### ■ Strategic Risk Reduction

Suppliers continue to strengthen how they identify, prioritize and mitigate labor-related risks across multi-region and multi-grower networks.

### ■ Internal Ownership Structures

Although broadly a strength area, a smaller subset of suppliers is still clarifying how social responsibility requirements are managed internally, particularly as expectations rise and supply chains grow more complex.

### ■ Documented Commitment & Producer Expectations

Documentation is a lower friction area overall, though it remains challenging for a small number of suppliers that are still early in their engagement journey.



“Across the industry, we’re seeing a growing trend where major customers are beginning to integrate social responsibility criteria into their compliance frameworks. ECIP provides a proactive pathway for suppliers to align with these evolving expectations.”

**Baha Sadduk**  
Food Safety & Traceability, Ag Tech Confidential



# Growers

## Grower Performance

The number of growers achieving higher engagement levels in 2025 increased across the platform. Most growers started the program year with zero or one engagement star; participation deepened through the year, with more growers earning multiple stars and **1,060** out of **1,770** participating growers (**60%**) being characterized as “highly-engaged,” either by earning over 3 ECIP green stars or through their participation in a third-party audit program that qualifies them for a gold star.

## Grower Areas of Strength

Aggregated grower responses show the strongest performance in the following areas:

### ■ Employment Freely Chosen

Growers overwhelmingly report documented protections that employment is voluntary, identity documents remain accessible, and workers retain freedom of movement and the ability to terminate employment. These systems reflect strong alignment with foundational Ethical Charter principles.

### ■ Worker Communication & Non-Retaliation Systems

Formal grievance mechanisms, documented non-retaliation policies and defined communication loops are increasingly embedded, suggesting that structured channels for worker feedback are becoming normalized across operations.

### ■ Documented Management Practices

Internal review processes, written procedures and responsible staff assignments are becoming more common, indicating that growers are moving from informal practice to replicable systems.

## Grower Areas for Improvement

As growers progress beyond foundational systems, attention is shifting toward effectiveness and continuous improvement.

### ■ Evaluating Effectiveness of Worker Feedback Systems

Growers identified adding grievance mechanisms and improving their effectiveness as continuous improvement priorities. Periodic review of how proactively workers use those systems presents an opportunity for deeper maturity and stronger communication cultures.

“

One of the greatest strengths of the ECIP is that it does not work against existing greenhouse programs; instead, it complements and strengthens them. Many greenhouse operations already have well-established strong labour practices in place, and ECIP provides a structured opportunity to revisit those practices, reinforce what is working well, and make targeted improvements where needed. Reviewing ECIP materials often serves as a reminder of lessons learned over time, prompting reflection and, in some cases, small adjustments that further strengthen existing programs.”

**Amy Cochrane-Knotek**, Greenhouse Compliance and Regulatory Affairs



### ■ Continuous Internal Review Cycles

Growers are increasingly implementing new management systems. The next step is strengthening routine internal assessment and timely follow-up when improvement opportunities arise.

### ■ Ethical Recruitment Integration

Formal adoption of the Employer Pays Principle and fully documented recruitment cost tracking remains an area for focused development. As management systems deepen and supply chain expectations evolve, ethical recruitment practices will need to continue to strengthen.

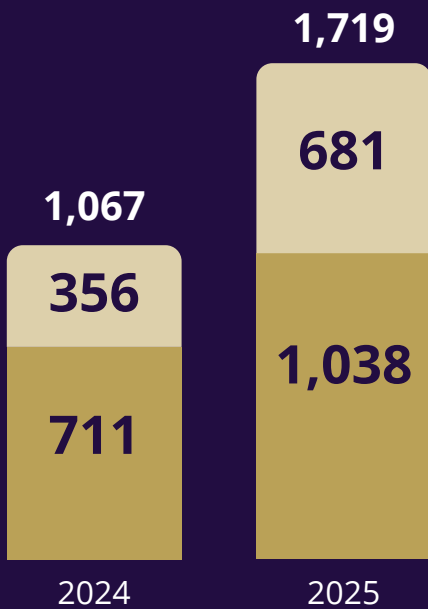
By reflecting on their progress, rather than their deficiencies, growers are advancing toward more sophisticated internal review as foundational policies take hold.

“ ECIP is not an audit. It’s not an, ‘oh, we’re going to get you’ type of thing, ECIP is an educational program. A lot of our growers have already been doing a lot of social responsibility programs and weren’t getting recognized for it. And this is a way that they not only get recognized, but they can learn through the platform.”

**Donna Lynn Brown,**  
Naturipe Farms



## Increasing Grower Participation



- No prior third-party audits
- Participating in an ECIP-approved field-level audit program

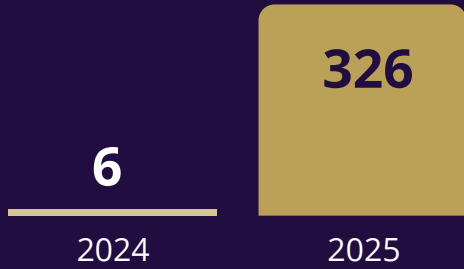
## Growers New to Social Responsibility

The number of growers entering ECIP without any prior labor certification increased significantly year over year. Growers can use ECIP’s tools and resources to build and strengthen internal programs at their own pace, without the immediate pressure of external audits. At the same time, participation also increased among growers who are already part of an approved audit program that aligns with the Ethical Charter, reinforcing ECIP’s complementary role within the broader social responsibility landscape.

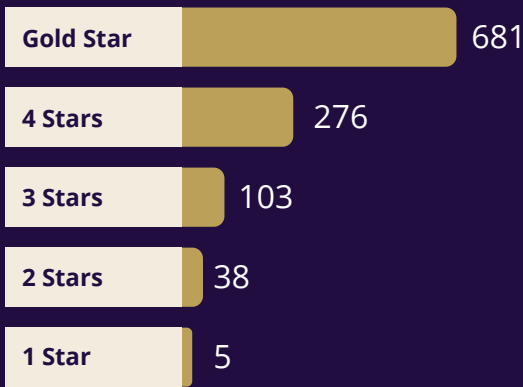
In 2024, of the **1,067** growers subscribed to ECIP, **67% (711)** had no prior third-party audits, while **33% (356)** were participating in a benchmarked audit program. By the end of 2025, the number of grower subscribers had grown to **1,719**, of whom **60% (1,038)** had no prior certification.

These numbers show how ECIP is already reaching a large segment of the produce supply chain whose labor practices had never received third-party verification and can expand in the future to offer continuous improvement support to thousands more such growers.

## Growers Holding a Gold Star Plus Four Green Stars



## 2025 Grower Stars Overview

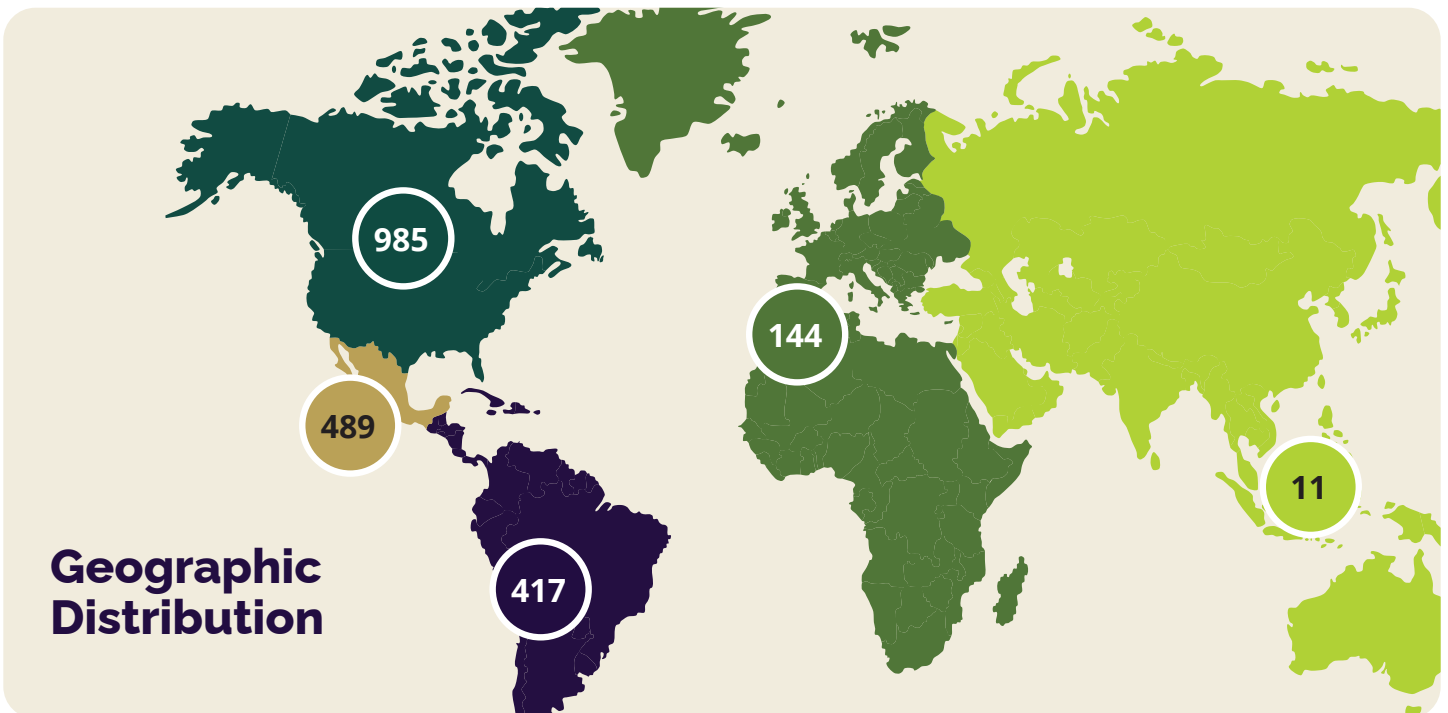


## Geographic Reach and Commodity

With Engagement 2.0 updates, several new questions were released in the grower assessment. Among them were questions regarding the geographic location and commodity portfolio of each growing operation. User responses showcase ECIP’s ability to serve growers and suppliers across diverse regions and commodities, and to target future support and attention to segments of the supply chain that are experiencing common challenges or opportunities.

## Geographic Distribution

ECIP user participation now spans North America, Mexico, Central and South America and South Africa, demonstrating that ECIP’s framework is applicable across diverse regulatory environments, labor markets and production systems. This map highlights the global footprint of ECIP participation, showing Mexico as the single most engaged geographic location, with dense activity in the United States and Canada anchoring the system.



Commodity	Number of Growers Self-Reporting Commodity
Avocados	158
Grapes	145
Blueberries	119
Apples	112
Other	111
Strawberries	96
Citrus	88
Cherries	72
Tomatoes	66
Peaches	63
Raspberries	63
Leafy Greens	50
Cucumbers	48
Bell Peppers	40
Broccoli	37
Blackberries	33
Spinach	28
Asparagus	26
Celery	26
Pears	24
Kiwis	21
Watermelons	21
Onions	20
Potatoes	17
Cantaloupes	16
Carrots	14
Tropical Fruits	14
Squash	12
Corn	11
Green Beans	8
Brussels Sprouts	7
Chiles	7
Bananas	6
Mangoes	6
Peas	5
Eggplants	3
Leeks	3
Mushrooms	2
Gourds	1
<b>Total Entries</b>	<b>1,804</b>

## Commodity Representation

The commodity chart demonstrates a balanced reach across fruit and vegetable categories, with particularly strong representation in avocados, berries, vine crops, citrus and tree fruit. This variety reflects ECIP’s applicability across different production models and seasonal cycles and supports its potential as a scalable program. Rather than concentration in a single crop or region, the data shows ECIP’s ability to support global application of the Ethical Charter.



## Closing a Gap in Avocados

Avocados represent one of the largest commodity categories within ECIP participation, with 158 growers reporting avocado production across the network. This level of engagement is notable in a commodity where formal social responsibility certification has historically been low. ECIP has provided an accessible onramp for avocado suppliers and growers to assess their labor practices, build internal systems and demonstrate continuous improvement, augmenting existing social responsibility programs.

GLC Cerritos, a 2026 ECIP Leadership Circle member, is an example of a supplier whose growers are 100% Fair Trade Certified, using an approved program that aligns to the Ethical Charter.

## WHAT ARE YOUR 2¢?

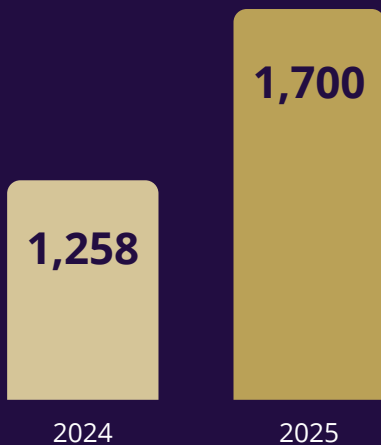
For less than 2¢ per avocado, you can empower our farm workers to invest in their community. Whether building a food dispensary or launching a water storage project, the Fair Trade program adds value to every member of the supply chain.

“ Growers, by nature, tend to have a sustainability mindset, they’re farming land that often belonged to their parents or grandparents, and they want to pass it down to future generations. Since then, we’ve led or participated in numerous initiatives, including Stronger Together, pollinator protection programs, and, most recently, adding organic and Fair Trade offerings. Joining the Ethical Charter Implementation Program is a natural next step. It reinforces our commitment to setting an example in the Avocados from Mexico category.”

**Giovanni Cavaletto**, CEO USA, GLC Cerritos



## Increasing Grower Participation



## Participation Over Time

In 2025, ECIP engaged over **300** suppliers and **1,700** growers, representing one of the most coordinated labor-management improvement efforts in the produce industry. Despite more rigorous Engagement 2.0 thresholds requiring participants to complete updated assessments, **88%** of supplier users renewed their subscriptions, as did **74%** of growers.

At the same time, the depth of engagement increased. **137** suppliers earned two or more stars, a **234%** increase over the prior year, and **43** suppliers achieved Gold Star status by year’s end. This growth rate, and the enthusiastic participation of suppliers and retailers in the ECIP Leadership Circle event at the Global Show in October, reveal how ECIP is providing a way for suppliers who support their growers to implement the Ethical Charter to distinguish themselves with their customers.

# ECIP Events

In-person and virtual events played a critical role in moving ECIP from early adoption to deeper engagement and sustained use. The success of these events showed the industry's excitement and education around ECIP.

## Organic Produce Summit: Launch of Engagement 2.0

An in-person event held during the Organic Produce Summit in July 2025 marked a pivotal moment for ECIP, serving as the public launch of Engagement 2.0 and the transition to updated criteria across the LAB platforms. Supported by supplier sponsorship from Rainier Fruit Company, the event convened more than 75 suppliers, growers, retailers and industry partners.

ECIP's role as a safe harbor environment where participants can assess gaps in their labor management systems and act, without fear of punitive commercial consequences, was reflected in the messaging of the summit itself, which emphasized clarity, predictability and fairness in the organic fresh produce industry.



Scan to learn  
more about  
Engagement 2.0



“ ECIP has allowed us to align our internal social responsibility goals with our buyers’ expectations in a more transparent and strategic way. It enhances our ability to monitor progress and proactively engage with suppliers—especially in preparation for retailer-driven initiatives.”

**Jamal Abshir**, Sustainability Coordinator, AMFRESH North America



## Leadership Circle Event: Deepening Commitment

A Leadership Circle event, held in October 2025 during the Global Fresh Produce and Floral Show, reflected the industry’s growing understanding of ECIP and its view of the program as a reliable and effective tool in aligning social responsibility efforts. This event was sponsored by Windset Farms®, Stemilt Growers and GoodFarms and brought together over 140 produce professionals.

Leadership Circle participation grew by more than 50% from 2024 to 2025, reflecting not only increased enrollment in ECIP but also a strong response to the rising bar for qualification, and sustained commitment among returning suppliers. Expectations also rose: To qualify for the Leadership Circle, suppliers needed to earn all five engagement stars, up from a minimum of two stars in the previous cycle.



Scan to read the press release

## Walmart Event: Retailer-Led Engagement in Action

During the 2025 Global Produce & Floral Show, Walmart convened 200 attendees for an ECIP information session for suppliers that provide products to Walmart and Sam's Club. The strong turnout underscores the influence of retail engagement in advancing ECIP's impact across the industry. At the event, Walmart's Vice President of Global Sourcing Laura Himes moderated a panel featuring leading supplier voices from Five Crowns Marketing, Naturipe Farms and Stemilt Growers, who shared practical insights on how they are using ECIP to assess risk, align internal teams and drive improvements throughout complex supply chains.

“ECIP provides growers and suppliers with the tools and resources they need to assess their management systems, benchmark their progress and drive continuous improvement. We were proud to bring together some of our suppliers to hear how they are using the program and to share how ECIP fits into our ethical sourcing priorities.”

**Laura Himes**, Vice President of Global Sourcing, Walmart



“There is such a huge opportunity to find the right workforce and create great careers and jobs in agriculture. And we think treating people with respect, and doing it in ways like this with the ECIP partnership, is a great way to build that standard and help move this forward.”

**Kevin Pate**, Senior Vice President, GMM Produce, Walmart



## Webinars and Additional Touch Points

In addition to in-person events, webinars remained an important engagement channel. Sessions supported onboarding, explained Engagement 2.0 updates and provided guidance on using ECIP as a continuous improvement tool. Rather than standing alone, webinars complemented retailer outreach and in-person convenings, reinforcing key messages and extending their reach. These efforts reinforced key messages for more than 800 viewers and extended the program's reach, made possible through a generous grant from The Kroger Co. Zero Hunger | Zero Waste Foundation.



Scan to View Webinars

# Looking Ahead

Next steps for ECIP in 2026 include advancing new program developments, such as the launch of FLC LAB for farm labor contractors. As ECIP continues to advance, retailers and consumers alike can expect to see more evidence of the fresh produce industry's progress toward fully implementing the Ethical Charter.



# ECIP

The Ethical Charter Implementation Program

[ethicalcharterprogram.org](http://ethicalcharterprogram.org)

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