

Hello, and welcome to Essentials of Food Safety for Farmworkers, a training series brought to you by the CCE Cornell Vegetable Program. Every produce farm should implement food safety practices to ensure that produce is safe for consumers. This is Caitlin Tucker, Program Assistant for the Cornell Vegetable Program. Throughout this series, I will walk you through how to create a worker training program, foodborne pathogens of concern, routes of contamination, principles of health and hygiene, risk assessment, and so much more.

This training aims to cover many of the required worker training topics set forth by FSMA (the Food Safety Modernization Act), or other 3rd party auditing programs. This training series primarily focuses on training farmworkers in the **produce** industry. Because Food Safety is a company-wide responsibility, we invite **all** farm employees to participate in this training.

Here are some highlights from Part 2: Food Safety and Why it Matters

- Every farmworker should be trained on food safety measures
- Some farms may be required, by law, to implement food safety
- Bacteria, viruses, and parasites can cause foodborne illnesses
- Foodborne pathogens can harm people, hurt businesses, decrease consumer confidence, or result in legal action
- Workers, animals, water, soil amendments, tools, surface, and equipment can all serve as sources of contamination or cross-contamination

Let's begin Part 3: Everyday Practices to Prevent Foodborne Illness

Objectives for Part 3 include:

- Identify everyday practices that workers can take to reduce risk of contaminating produce with foodborne pathogens
- Outline the steps of proper handwashing
- Identify when hands should be washed
- Describe the proper way to deal with injuries
- List symptoms of foodborne illnesses

In general, farmworkers should be expected to:

- Follow standards of personal health and hygiene, including wearing clean clothing and footwear
- Follow farm policies for jewelry and or glove-wearing
- Follow proper handwashing procedures, including knowing when to wash hands
- Notify their supervisor if they are ill
- Refrain from eating, chewing gum, or using tobacco products while working with produce.
- Minimize contact with animals (other than working animals)

Let's dive into the details...

Guidelines for Clothing and Footwear.

- Employees should wear clean clothes to work each day.
- Employees should wear clean shoes or boots.
- If you work with animals and produce, consider having separate sets of footwear and clothing. This can help to prevent cross contamination.
- If you are required to wear gloves, change them when they become torn or contaminated.
- If you wear reusable gloves, they should be cleaned often.
- Aprons, gloves, and other personal protective equipment (such as goggles, facemasks, respirators, etc.) should always be removed before using the toilet. They should store in a clean, designated area when they are not being used.

Guidelines on Jewelry

Many people wear watches, their wedding rings, bracelets, or earrings. In many work environments these are not a concern, but on the farm, jewelry can easily trap soils as well as contaminants in the tiniest of spaces. Not only can jewelry innocently spread foodborne pathogens, but they can also be physical contaminants. For example, if the back of an earring were to fall off into a bag of lettuce. Jewelry can also pose a hazard to workers. Loose jewelry can get caught on machinery. If possible, you should avoid wearing unnecessary jewelry to the farm.

If you must wear jewelry, such as your wedding ring, it should be covered with a glove when you are handling produce. Be aware, that if you wear jewelry on your hands, it can cause tears in gloves or other garments.

If jewelry is worn uncovered, employees should take extra care in washing around and underneath the jewelry.

Guidelines on Glove Use

Always follow your farm's policy on glove-wearing. Some farms may require their workers to wear gloves, where others may not. If you do wear gloves, inspect them prior to use, to make sure they do not have holes, tears, or cracks in them. Furthermore, gloves should be clean before you use them to handle produce. Gloves should be stored in a designated clean, dry environment when not in use. Single use gloves should not be reused.

And remember to always remove your gloves before taking breaks, using the restroom, or handling trash. You should always wash your hands prior to wearing your gloves.

Proper Handwashing

Proper handwashing is very important. It can prevent you from catching or spreading foodborne pathogens, as well as other germs like the flu, or COVID19. Handwashing is also effective at removing harmful pesticide residues. Let's review the proper way to wash hands.

Step 1. Wet hands with water. The water can be hot or cold.

Step 2. Apply soap and lather. Wash the front and backs of hands, in between your fingers, and underneath nails. Rub hands together for AT LEAST 20 seconds.

Step 3. Rinse hands thoroughly with clean water

Step 4. Dry with a paper towel

Step 5. Turn off faucet with used towel

Step 6. Throw the paper towel in a trash can

What about hand sanitizers? Hand sanitizers are absolutely not a substitute for hand washing! Why is that? Hand sanitizers do not get rid of 100% of germs.

Your hands need to be cleaned with soap and water before the sanitizer can work. If your hands are dirty or greasy the hand sanitizer may not be effective.

Hand sanitizers might not remove pesticides or other harmful chemical.

When should hands be washed?

- Before starting or returning to work
- Before putting on gloves
- Before and after eating and smoking.
- After using the toilet
- After touching animals or animal waste
- Any other time hands may become dirty or contaminated. For example, when you are taking out the trash, emptying cull bins, before and after you treat a cut or a wound, after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.

Use of Toilets

It is very important that all urination and defecation happens in the toilet, not in the field. One toilet and one hand washing facility are required for every twenty workers. The toilet and handwashing facility must be located in close proximity to each other and within ¼ mile. Toilet paper should always be thrown away in the toilet and not in the trash can or on the floor. And remember always wash your hands after using the toilet.

What should you do when you are ill?

You should absolutely NOT work with produce if you are sick. You can contaminate produce through coughing, sneezing, or not washing your hands after using the restroom. Symptoms of illness can include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Jaundice
- Abdominal cramps
- Sore throat

Heat exhaustion and pesticide exposure share some similar symptoms to foodborne illness. Heat exhaustion may cause you to feel faint, dizzy, have muscle cramps, headaches, nausea, or cause vomiting. If it is a very warm day and you have been hard at work outside, your body may be having a hard time cooling itself down. If you suspect you are experiencing heat exhaustion, it is important that you drink fluids containing electrolytes and cool yourself down.

Symptoms of pesticide exposure include nausea, headache or dizziness, red or watery eyes, irritated or burning skin, throat irritation or difficulty breathing, stomach cramps, diarrhea, or vomiting.

It is important that employees be aware of how they are feeling. If you suspect you have a foodborne illness, ask your supervisor if there is another task you can work on that does not involve contact with produce.

What should you do if you are injured?

- Follow your farm's standard operating procedure for injuries.
- If the injury is severe, call 911 or have someone else call 911. IF the injury is minor, locate your farm's First Aid Kit.
- For minor injuries, clean and bandage all wounds. If the wound is on the hand, a glove should be worn. This will help prevent blood, bodily fluids, or the bandage from contaminating produce while you continue working. This will also help protect you! An open wound is more exposed to harsh chemicals like sanitizers, fertilizers, or pesticides. Your wound will be protected if it is bandaged and gloved.
- Throw away produce that may be contaminated from blood or bodily fluids.
- Clean and sanitize any items that came in contact with blood or bodily fluids.
- And finally, report all injuries to supervisor and record in the injury log. It is important to have this record in case produce was contaminated and a produce recall needs to happen.

What about drinking water and break areas?

- You should only drink potable water from the designated water source. Only use single cups, do NOT share cups with other people.
- Do not bring glass containers to drink from, use plastic or metal containers. Glass containers can break and shatter and contaminate produce or cause physical harm.
- Only refill water containers from a designated water source.
- Do not eat, chew gum, or use tobacco products in while harvesting, washing, sorting, or packing produce. These activities should only happen in your farm's designated break area.

In Summary...

- Worker health and hygiene is critical for ensuring food safety on the farm.
- Always follow your farm's food safety policies on clothing, footwear, jewelry, glove-wearing, illness, injuries, etc.
- Follow hand-washing recommendations including when to wash hands.
- Understand how injuries can introduce contamination
- Do not eat, chew gum, or use tobacco products when working with produce

Thank you for watching Part 3: Everyday Practices to Prevent Foodborne Illness. If you have any questions or would like clarification or help identifying resources, do not hesitate to reach out. You can reach Extension Specialist Robert Hadad via email at rgh26@cornell.edu or by phone at 585-739-4065. You can reach CVP Technician, Caitlin Tucker, at cv275@cornell.edu or by phone at 573-544-4783. If you would like to learn more about the Cornell Vegetable Program visit cvp.cce.cornell.edu.

Next Up: Part 4: Reducing Food Safety Risks on the Farm