



Produce Food Safety at the Market

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Displays

Displaying produce safely requires attention to reducing the risk of contamination. Place produce that may be consumed uncooked, on clean, sanitized tables or stands – never on the ground. Large or heavy ornamental items such as pumpkins, or items that will be cooked, such as winter squash, can be placed on a clean plastic tarp or in a clean food storage container on the ground if the space is needed. Displaying food in plastic tubs is a good way to maintain food safety and can be attractive and serve as part of your “brand.”

Use a clean cloth or disposable plastic tablecloth to create a clean and attractive display; if cloth, wash after every use.

Remember that you are part of the display, and wear clean clothes. Wear minimal jewelry – especially rings, as these can allow germs to hide from hand-cleaning.



Do not reuse cardboard or wood baskets that cannot be sanitized. If wood baskets are desired for displays, line them with food-grade plastic bags. Also, do not reuse plastic grocery bags for produce, as they may contain pathogens from a previous item.

Keep produce in the shade if possible. During hot periods, it may be best to keep one or two items of produce for display, with the rest in a cooler (make an attractive sign indicating “more in cooler to keep it fresh for you” so the customer doesn’t hesitate to buy “the last one”).

Food Safety for Produce

Watch over your stall; prevent contact with produce by customers, including small children and pets. Pre-bagging small items can help reduce customer handling, as well as speed sales. If you use a weighing scale, clean it with a food-grade sanitizer frequently. Use deli tissues to handle produce and encourage customers to do the same – or have them point to what they want rather than picking it up themselves.

Bacteria can survive on and be transmitted on money. If possible, have one person designated to handle cash, while the other(s) bag produce. Alternatively, use deli tissues to handle the produce between handling cash. Although hand sanitizer will not kill all kinds of germs, it can reduce transmission of some of the food-borne illnesses, so use it frequently. Use unscented forms.

Food Safety when Offering Food Samples

Offering samples can be an effective tool for introducing customers to new produce or food items and can help increase sales. However, from a food safety standpoint, there are important aspects to consider. For more information on the regulatory aspects of offering food samples in South Dakota, see Chapter 9 of the South Dakota Farmers Market Guide, or search on “Food Samples” at extension.sdstate.edu.

Food Safety when Donating Produce

Vendors may have unsold produce at the end of a selling day. Handling this produce can be a challenge, because the fresh, high-quality products may not hold over until the next market day. Consider coordination with a local food bank so vendors can donate unsold produce while it is still in good condition. Be sure all who handle the produce follow recommended food safety practices, including washing their hands and using suitable containers that are clean and intended for food.

Glove Use at Farmers Markets

Many people assume that wearing gloves prevents contamination. However, gloves can transfer harmful microorganisms to produce just as easily as bare hands. Correct use of gloves maintains the safety of harvested fruits and vegetables. Be sure to wash your hands and bandage cuts before putting on gloves and when changing to a fresh pair. Then, wash your hands after removing gloves. *Never wash and reuse single-use gloves.* Food handlers should change their gloves in the following situations:

- If the gloves become torn or punctured
- Before beginning a new task
- If a task is interrupted. For example, by answering the telephone, gathering supplies, assisting with the cash register, handling money, or emptying trash
- After two hours of continual use
- If the gloves are contaminated. For example, sneezing
- When the food being handled changes from raw to cooked or ready-to-eat
- When leaving the food preparation and serving area

Worker Health, Hygiene and Hand Washing Health and Hygiene

Health, hygiene, and hand washing apply to all stages of production, processing, and marketing. Food handlers can easily contaminate fresh produce with disease-causing microorganisms. Many of these organisms have the capability to survive on fresh fruits and vegetables for an extended time, from several days to weeks. Once the organism is established on fresh produce, it is very hard to remove. If a vendor or employee is sick, they should not handle food, food products, utensils, containers, and other types of food contact surfaces.

The following symptoms are indicative of a foodborne illness and necessary precautions should be followed to avoid contaminating produce:

- Diarrhea, fever, vomiting, jaundice, or sore throat with fever
- A cut containing pus, such as a boil or infected wound that is draining and located on the hands, arms, wrists, or a body part that is not covered.
- If the employee has been diagnosed with a foodborne illness or lives with someone that has been diagnosed with a foodborne illness.

Open wounds can harbor disease-causing microorganisms. If the wounds cannot be covered adequately with a



bandage or glove, the field worker should not be handling fruits and vegetables or food contact surfaces, such as containers. Duties that do not involve contact with or close proximity to foods and food contact surfaces are recommended.

Be certain to change out of any clothing worn in animal production areas before working with produce, at your farm or the market. Muddy boots can carry fecal material into your produce field.

If portable restrooms are used, place them away from the production field so contamination is not carried on shoes, clothing, or insects onto fresh produce. All restrooms must have handwashing facilities complete with soap, potable water, single use paper towels, and trash can. Portable hand-washing stations can be used (see below).

Workers should refrain from using a cell phone when handling produce, as bacteria can be transferred from the phone onto the produce. Remember that bacteria can also hide in the crevices of jewelry, so it is recommended to refrain from wearing rings when handling produce. Dangling jewelry also can be a safety hazard – for the worker as well as the produce.

Hand Washing

Hand washing is an important part of food safety. Wash your hands in the following situations:

Before	After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvesting, picking, packing, transporting, bagging, displaying or otherwise handling fresh produce • Putting on single-use gloves • Preparing foods on-site • Presenting a cooking demonstration • Preparing food samples • Handling ready-to-eat products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touching and feeding animals • Going to the bathroom • Coughing or sneezing • Eating or drinking • Handling dirty tools or equipment • Handling money • Using a cell phone

Proper Hand Washing Steps:

1. Wet hands with warm water from spigot
2. Apply soap and rub for 20 seconds
3. Rinse hands using water from spigot to remove all soap
4. Dry with a paper towel (Germs thrive on wet hands!)

Building a Hand Washing Station

There are many situations and times when a grower or produce handler should wash their hands. Hand sanitizers and moist wipes do not replace the need for hand washing. These products are not effective in removing bacteria when debris such as food particles or dirt are on hands. Hand sanitizers should not be used in place of good hand washing. To overcome the lack of hand washing facilities consider building a temporary hand washing station.

Growers, farmers markets, or individual vendors can build their own, simple hand washing station when one is not available. A hand washing station should be easily accessible for all food handlers on site. A low-cost one can easily be created by assembling the following:

1. 5-gallon water jug/container with hands-free spigot
2. Bucket large enough to catch wastewater
3. Liquid hand soap in pump dispenser
4. Paper towels (pass a bungee cord thru the roll so they do not blow away)
5. Garbage can for used paper towels.
6. Water from a potable source

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