



Farm Food Safety Worker Health and Hygiene

Farm worker health and hygiene are critical components of your farm's food safety plan. Sick workers and poor hygiene practices can contaminate food and cause foodborne illness outbreaks. Implementing health and hygiene policies can help reduce unwanted contamination of your produce from harvest to sale.

How Farm Workers Contaminate Food

Farm workers can contaminate food in many ways, for example:

- When they are sick
- When caring for someone who is sick
- When they have exposed cuts, sores or open wounds that are infected
- When hands and/or clothing are contaminated

Health and Hygiene Policies and Training

Annual trainings on health and hygiene policies keep workers aware of expectations and foster good communication about these issues. Develop health and hygiene policies and review them at least yearly with family members, workers, and volunteers. Suggested training topics include: basic hygiene, recommended handwashing technique, and reporting injury or illness.

Be sure to include well-defined written procedures for your workers and/or volunteers to report illnesses. Model the health and hygiene practices you want your workers to follow to reinforce the training and emphasize the value of your policies.

Visitors to your farm can also contaminate food and need to be informed of your handwashing and illness policies.

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Handwashing

Model the health and hygiene practices you want your workers to follow to reinforce the training and emphasize the value of your policies.

Did You Know?

Salmonella can contaminate not only poultry and eggs but a wide variety of foods, including: beef, fruits, pork, sprouts, vegetables and nuts. It can also be found in the intestinal tracts of livestock, wildlife, pets and humans. Salmonella can be spread to anything, including people, that comes in contact with the infected animal.



Rows of squash plants.

Worker Health

Ask family members, workers and volunteers to report any health problems to the person in charge before coming to work. Anyone with the following symptoms should not be permitted to handle food:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- Sore throat with a fever

Owners and workers diagnosed by a health practitioner with an illness caused by these pathogens, must wait until their health practitioner indicates it is safe to handle food:

- *Salmonella Typhi* or *non-typhoidal Salmonella*
- *Shigella Spp.*
- *Norovirus*
- *Hepatitis A*
- *E. coli O157:H7* or other *E. coli*

This also applies if you or your workers have been exposed to someone who has been diagnosed with one of these illnesses.

Recommended Hygiene Practices

Personal Cleanliness

- Shower or bathe daily. Pathogens can be found on skin and hair.
- Keep fingernails short and as clean as possible. Long fingernails can hold dirt and bacteria that can contaminate food. Fingernails can puncture fruits and vegetables, reducing the quality and safety of the produce.

Wounds

- Cover wounds on hands or arms with a protective covering or impermeable bandage and a single use glove. Use bright colored bandages that are easy to spot if they fall off.

Work Attire

- Wear clean clothing daily. Bacteria can be transferred from clothing to hands, and then to food.
 - Change or cover clothes and footwear between handling animals or applying chemicals and harvesting or handling food.
 - Wear hair restraints such as a clean hat, bandana, or elastic band. This keeps hair away from the food and prevents workers from touching it.
 - Remove all jewelry. Rings, bracelets, and watches can harbor bacteria that can contaminate food during handling.
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Recommended Handwashing Practices

Clean hands help keep produce safe during harvest and processing. Follow these guidelines for how and when to wash your hands.

When to Wash Hands

- Before starting work
- Before and after eating, drinking or smoking
- After using the bathroom
- After handling animals or using pesticides
- When changing from field to processing tasks
- Before handling ready-to-eat foods or produce that will be eaten raw
- After touching your hair or clothing
- After coughing or sneezing
- After touching anything that might contaminate your hands.

How to Wash Hands

- Wet hands with warm, potable water.
- Apply soap—enough to build up a good lather.
- Scrub hands and arms vigorously for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to clean between fingers and under fingernails.
- Rinse hands and arms thoroughly using warm, potable water.
- Dry hands and arms using a single-use paper towel or hand dryer.
- Use the paper towel to turn off the faucet or open the door when leaving the restroom.

Single-Use Gloves

Gloves should not replace handwashing. However, when used with handwashing, they provide an effective barrier and decrease the transfer of pathogens from hands to food. Follow these guidelines:

- Wash hands before putting on gloves.
- When putting on gloves, do not handle parts of the glove that will come in direct contact with food.
- Do not blow into gloves before putting them on.
- Use food-grade gloves.
- Wear gloves when handling ready-to-eat foods. Avoid bare hand contact.
- Cover an infected wound with protective covering or bandage and a disposable glove.
- Change gloves between tasks.
- Do not wash or reuse gloves.
- Change gloves when torn or damaged.



Gloved hands

Did You Know?

Gloves can be a source of contamination when they are not used correctly. Use food-grade gloves and wash your hands before putting on gloves or changing to a new pair.

For More Information

Please access our Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) web pages: <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/category/food-safety-modernization-act-fsma>

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