FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: FOOD SAFETY FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Consumers are increasingly concerned about the safety of the food they eat. Public demand continues to grow for assurances that a recognized system of safeguards is in place. Clear, discernible, science-based rules should apply when assessing the risk of contamination of food products.

Q: Why should I be concerned about food safety, and what impact does it have on my business?

A: Fruits and vegetables are essential elements to a healthy diet. Suppliers who want to grow and improve their business recognize that retailers and consumers are demanding a more transparent system in the fresh fruit and vegetable industries. Having a nationally recognized, carefully documented food safety plan helps suppliers to reduce risks and prevent contamination before it occurs.

Q: What is the CanadaGAP® Program?

A: To meet food safety requirements, fresh produce suppliers must assess potential hazards within their operation, and then document and monitor the practices in place to reduce the risk of contamination. The CanadaGAP Program considers ways to prevent all possible hazards (biological, chemical and physical), since removing or killing bacteria is difficult. The CanadaGAP manual(s) and appendices outline Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and provide a formal system for documentation.

Q: Why do I need to train my employees?

A: Foodborne illnesses can stem from poor employee hygiene. Microorganisms that cause illness can be transferred directly from an employee's hands to fresh produce if the employee does not wash their hands properly. Training employees in the role they play in a food safety program can help decrease the risk of contamination, and provides employees with important information—such as what to do if they are sick at work. All employees must receive training in food handling, personal hygiene practices, biosecurity and any other food safety-related aspects of their job, such as equipment cleaning and proper use of chemicals. It is important that employees understand the role they play in keeping produce safe.

Q: What is due diligence?

A: Due diligence is the level of judgment, care, prudence, determination and activity that a person is reasonably expected to maintain under particular circumstances.

Applied to food safety for fresh fruits and vegetables, due diligence means that suppliers must take all reasonable precautions, under the particular circumstances, to prevent contamination of their product. All suppliers are expected to exercise due diligence in ensuring that fruits and vegetables are safe.

Did you know?

- The risk of contracting foodborne illness from fresh fruits and vegetables is low considering how much fresh produce people consume. Per capita consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables in Canada is approximately 210 kg. Based on this average, the Canadian population, e.g., 32 million people, consumes 6.7 million tons of produce every year.
- A study of public washrooms found that while 91% of people said they always wash their hands after using a public washroom, only 83% actually did.
- Contaminated wash water has caused food poisoning outbreaks in some fruit and vegetables. Be proactive about water quality by assessing water sources and testing water twice a year. Add and monitor water treatment if necessary.
- The CanadaGAP Program considers ways to prevent all possible hazards (biological, chemical, physical), since removing or killing bacteria is difficult. The CanadaGAP manuals cover every step of production and focus on reducing the risk of contamination.

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