FACTSHEET: WATER QUALITY

WATER FOR FLUMING AND CLEANING

Water may be used by fruit and vegetable suppliers for a number of different reasons (e.g., cleaning product, equipment or personal hygiene) using a variety of practices. It is important to assess the quality of the water as it may be a vehicle for biological or chemical contamination.

Q: Do I need to test the final rinse water, even if the well water test is fine, or if I am using municipal water?

A: Yes, water for the final rinse needs to be tested from the nozzles of the rinsing equipment, even if you are using municipal water or if you have already tested your water source. Bacteria can build up over time on the spray nozzles, water lines, washing equipment and hoses and eventually contaminate the water as it flows through. If the water test from

the rinse equipment indicates contamination but the source water is clean, you should clean out any nozzles, equipment and hoses with a sanitizer such as bleach.

However, some sanitizers may damage sensitive equipment. Check with your equipment supplier, manufacturers' instructions, and/or sanitizer labels and suppliers to ensure the sanitizer is safe for its intended use.

Q: Will adding chlorine or other sanitizers to my wash water kill all the bacteria on the surface of the product?

A: No. Treating wash water for potability ensures that water remains clean and does not contaminate the product. While the water itself may help to wash some contamination off the product, neither the water nor the sanitizer can be relied upon to effectively remove or kill all bacteria that is on the surface of the product. This is why it is important to reduce the risk of contamination at each step in the production chain.

Q: Over time, I find I have to add more chlorine to my dump/ wash tank to get the same oxidation-reduction potential (ORP) or free chlorine reading. Why?

A: You probably need to change the water in your tank more often. If there is a lot of dirt or plant debris in your tank, the chlorine is used up much faster. Changing the water more often or installing a filtration system to remove some of the organic matter will help reduce the amount of chlorine you have to use to keep the water clean. You could also check the batteries or calibration of your ORP meter (Note: some ORP meters cannot be calibrated).

Q: Why do I have to monitor the temperature of my product and wash water?

A: It is possible for water to be drawn inside some fruits and vegetables. This occurs when a hot product is submerged in cold water. The temperature differential creates a vacuum and water is sucked inside. If there are contaminants in the water, they will also be carried inside of the product, and cannot be washed off. Control water and product temperature by precooling the product or heating and/or treating the water to keep it potable. Doing both will provide the greatest benefits to product safety and quality.

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