

## Farm Worker Hygiene

One of the ways that fruits and vegetables can become contaminated with illness-causing bacteria or viruses is through contact by farm workers. If these workers are sick or not practicing good hygiene, then contamination of foods can occur. Promoting good worker hygiene is one of the most important steps a farmer can take to prevent contamination of their fruits and vegetables with foodborne pathogens.

### Steps to maintaining good worker hygiene

#### 1) Prevent ill employees from having contact with food

It is important for farm workers to report when they are feeling ill. Symptoms of specific concern include **vomiting, nausea, diarrhea or jaundice**. These symptoms could indicate that the worker has an illness that is readily transferred when handling food, and the employee should leave work and not return until they are free of symptoms for 24 hours or have a signed medical release. For jaundice, a signed medical release should always be required.

Employees with other illnesses such as a sore throat or cough should be excluded from food contact, but can stay at work and be assigned other tasks which do not involve handling food or food containers.

#### 2) Train employees on proper hygiene procedures such as handwashing, including

##### When should hands be washed?

Hands should be washed before beginning work and upon returning from work after a break (after using the restroom, smoking or using tobacco, eating, handling trash, etc.).

##### What are proper handwashing procedures?

1. Turn on water and wet hands and wrists.
2. Apply soap to hands.
3. Rub hands and scrub wrists vigorously for at least 20 seconds, including backs of hands, between fingers, around cuticles, under fingernails and under wrists.
4. Rinse hands well.
5. Dry hands with a disposable paper towel.
6. If using a public restroom, use paper towel to turn off faucet, turn off light and open door.
7. Dispose of the paper towel in a trash receptacle.

**\*\* Post signs in bathroom and handwashing areas for workers to use as a guide to follow. \*\***

##### What about hand sanitizers?

Hand sanitizers are good, but they cannot take the place of handwashing. Thorough washing will cut down on the numbers of microorganisms present which in turn helps to enhance the effectiveness of the sanitizer. Hand sanitizers should only be used *after* proper handwashing, *not* in place of it.



### 3) Train employees on proper glove use during harvesting and/or packing

Gloves are not required for use by workers during harvesting. If gloves are not used, handwashing should be monitored. If gloves are used, disposable single use gloves are the best choice. Keep in mind when purchasing gloves that some workers may have a latex sensitivity.

#### If using gloves, what is the recommended procedure?

- ◆ Wash hands prior to putting gloves on.
- ◆ Avoid touching hair, face, skin, etc. with gloves.
- ◆ Change gloves after meals, smoking, using the bathroom, or any time they become soiled, torn or otherwise damaged.

### 4) Provide workers with access to handwashing and toilet facilities

Clean, sanitary bathroom facilities should be made available to workers. These should be located close to where planting or harvesting is occurring in order to encourage use (see *Enhancing the Safety of Locally Grown Produce: Farm Worker Toilet and Handwashing Facilities* for how to create acceptable handwashing and toilet stations). If there are few workers and the home restroom is to be used, the facility should be cleaned regularly, and hand towels should be replaced with single use paper towels.



Courtesy of Coastal Georgia Small Farmers Cooperative, Inc.

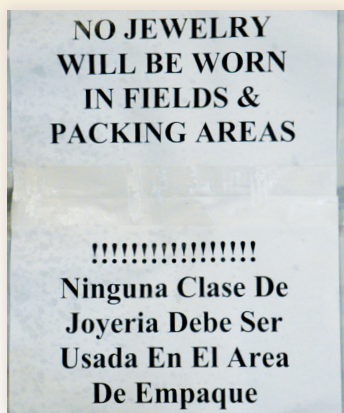
▲ Post handwashing instructions for workers in their native language.

### 5) Train employees on basic first aid procedures

Minor injuries like cuts and abrasions can lead to contamination of fruits or vegetables. Workers should be trained on how to respond to a cut, abrasion or other injury.

- ◆ They should be made aware of the location of a fully stocked first aid kit and the steps that they should take to tend to an injury. Cuts and abrasions should be bandaged and covered with a glove.
- ◆ Produce that may have come in contact with blood or other bodily fluids must be discarded. Bury the contaminated produce or compost it in an area where it will not contaminate other produce in the field. Prevent shovels or other tools used with the contaminated produce from coming in contact with other produce or with surfaces that will contact other produce. Blood and bodily fluids should be removed before disinfecting tools and surfaces. Wear gloves. Spray or flood the surface with a disinfecting solution of  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup plain, household chlorine bleach per gallon of water and let stand 5 minutes. If contamination occurs in the packing shed, use appropriate cleaning and disinfecting methods for the surface involved (concrete, carpet, tile, etc.). Remove surface materials as necessary and dispose of materials in a manner approved by the county environmental health department. Disinfect cleaning equipment (gloves, brushes, etc.) or dispose of properly. Use single use materials when possible, and discard in a manner that prevents contamination of facilities and products and prevents human contact.

### 6) Other considerations to ensure that workers do not transfer contamination to food



Courtesy of Coastal Georgia Small Farmers Cooperative, Inc.

▲ Remind workers that no jewelry should be worn in the fields or packing areas.

- ◆ Prohibit eating, drinking, chewing gum and using tobacco when handling produce. The mouth can be a source of microorganisms that can contaminate the hands and then be transferred to tools or to produce.
- ◆ Provide drinking water with either a fountain or single use containers and a trash receptacle. Single use containers prevent possible contamination from handling used containers.
- ◆ Encourage workers to arrive at work wearing clean clothing. Dirty clothing can be a source of contamination.
- ◆ If workers have long hair, it should be pulled back or kept under a hat.
- ◆ Restrict workers from wearing jewelry when handling produce. Jewelry can be a source of contamination and can cause physical injury (such as broken teeth, lacerations, etc.) if it gets into the product.
- ◆ Empower employees to help in maintaining a sanitary, pest-free food handling facility by rewarding safe handling practices.
- ◆ Provide training to employees on the importance of safe food handling and their role in providing safe food.

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