Enhancing The Safety of Locally Grown Produce

Farm Worker Toilet and Handwashing Facilities

Promoting good worker hygiene is one of the most important steps farmers can take to prevent contamination of their fruits and vegetables with foodborne disease-causing microorganisms referred to as pathogens. A key step in promoting good hygiene is ensuring that there are handwashing stations and toilet facilities available on the farm in close proximity (not more than ¼ mile) to the workers.

Setting up a good handwashing station

Thorough handwashing is a "best practice" for keeping food safe. 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.

A good handwashing station should be equipped with the following items:

- A clean container holding potable water (water that is suitable for drinking).
- Single use paper towels.
- Hand soap or antibacterial soap.
- Trash receptacle.

Additional tips for a good handwashing station

- Use a large, closed, plastic container such as a carboy that has a spigot to hold the potable water.
- Use another large plastic container or bucket to catch the wash water.
- The handwashing station should be located close to where the workers are working in order for it to be easy for them to use.
- If your farm is large enough, house the handwashing station on a trailer so that it can be moved around your farm as the workers move from plot to plot.
- Include a sign with handwashing instructions or pictures for workers to follow. The instructions should be in English and/or Spanish or other native language.
- The station should be monitored on a regular schedule to ensure that it is clean and stocked with water, soap, paper towels etc.

Examples of handwashing stations that farmers have created on their properties

Courtesy of Wythe Morris, Virginia Tech

Picture 1. The farmer constructed the station on a small trailer so that it can be moved around on the property. It has a sink with a faucet and mounted soap and paper towel dispensers.

Courtesy of Wythe Morris, Virginia Tech

Picture 2. This is a simpler station, with the water container sitting on stacked pallets and a funnel collecting the wash water into a bucket underneath. A bottle of soap with a pump dispenser is on the pallet. Paper towels are stored in a covered plastic container beside the pallet.

Courtesy of Wythe Morris, Virginia Tech

▲ **Picture 3.** This station is set outside of a packing house or outbuilding and is not mobile. Here a sign with handwashing instructions is mounted below the water source.

Courtesy of Wythe Morris, Virginia Tech

▲ **Picture 4.** This is a more substantial handwashing station on a trailer which also holds the portable toilet facilities.

Setting up adequate toilet facilities

On the farm, the most common toilet facilities are rented portable toilets. One portable toilet for every 15 to 20 workers is recommended. Facilities should be located not more than a 1/4 mile walk from each hand laborer's place of work in the field.

- Facilities should be located next to or in close proximity to the handwashing station so that workers can wash hands after using the toilet.
- The portable facility can be mounted on a trailer so that it can be moved around the farm from plot to plot to make it easier for the workers to use.
- It should be serviced and cleaned on a regular basis.

Courtesy of Wythe Morris, Virginia Tech

Courtesy of Wythe Morris, Virginia Tech

Very small farm operations may have primarily family or neighbors harvesting product. In this case a home toilet is acceptable. However, single use paper towels are recommended and the toilet facilities should be serviced and cleaned on a regular basis.

Going to the bathroom in the woods or other areas adjacent to growing areas should be avoided due to the risk of run-off or transfer into the fields.

This project was supported all, or in part, by a grant from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture (Award Number 2009-51110-20161).

Publication #FDNS-E-168-7. R. Boyer, J.A. Harrison, J.W. Gaskin, M.A. Harrison, J. Cannon and G. Zehnder. February 2012

The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating. Cooperative Extension, the University of Georgia Colleges of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and Family and Consumer Sciences, offers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, gender or disability. An Equal Opportunity Employer/Affirmative Action Organization, Committed to a Diverse Work Force.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
College of Family and Consumer Sciences

CLEMSON COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Virginia Cooperative Extension
A partnership of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University www.ext.vt.edu
VirginiaTech Invent the Future
VSU VIRGINIA STATE