

Food Safety *eNews*

www.extension.umn.edu/foodsafety

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To Wash or Not to Wash?

Recommendations for Fresh Produce

In recent years we've heard about foodborne illness outbreaks from lettuce, spinach, and other fresh produce. The impact of these outbreaks is felt by the growers and distributors, by grocery stores, and by food establishments like yours. As a provider of fresh produce, what steps do you take to serve safe food?

Following are the most current recommendations.

For **bulk produce** remember that all bulk leafy greens, whole heads, and other bulk produce with edible skin and skin of melons should be washed at the restaurant or food service establishment before serving. Wash vigorously under cool running water.

For **bagged or ready-to-eat, fresh-cut produce** such as lettuce, spinach, and leafy green salad mixtures, there has been conflicting information. For example, do you re-wash bagged, ready-to-eat lettuce?

In *Food Protection Trends*, November 2007, a new study was published with insight into the subject. A panel of 13 scientists with expertise in microbial safety of fresh produce reviewed recent research and guidelines for food service establishments and here's what they recommend:

- Carefully read labels to determine whether a product is a raw agricultural commodity (e.g. hearts of Romaine) that should be washed before consumption or a ready-to-eat (RTE) food product (e.g. pre-washed lettuce/leafy green salad). If the product is not labeled "washed", "triple washed", or "ready-to-eat", it **must** be washed before consumption.
- Leafy green salads in sealed bays labeled "washed", "triple washed", or "ready-to-eat" that are produced in a facility inspected by a regulatory authority and operated under "Good Manufacturing Practices" (GMP) do not need additional washing at the time of use unless specially directed on the label.
- Additional washing of ready-to-eat leafy green salads is not likely to increase safety. The risk of cross-contamination from food handlers and food contact surfaces used during washing may outweigh any safety benefit that further washing may do.

Did you know...

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently made the decision to allow food producers of fresh spinach and iceberg lettuce to use irradiation to kill micro-organisms like E.coli and salmonella which cause foodborne illness in humans.
- Fresh-cut fruit and vegetable sales in North America has grown to \$15 billion per year, and even given the food-borne illness outbreaks, is not expected to decrease.

Additional Considerations:

- Before handling RTE lettuce/leafy green salads, wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and warm water. Rewash hands as necessary.
- Use a barrier like single use gloves or an appropriate clean, sanitized utensil to handle and dispense fresh-cut lettuce/leafy green salads.
- RTE lettuce/leafy green salads should be shipped, stored, and displayed under refrigeration.
- RTE lettuce/leafy green salad shipping containers may become contaminated during transport and storage so inspect cartons or bags upon receipt and reject any that show evidence of mishandling.

(Food Protection Trends, Vol.27, No.11, Pages 892-898)



Online Renewal Course Available

As a Certified Food Manager you need to renew your certification every three years by obtaining four hours of continuing education. There are two ways you can complete the necessary four hours of training:

1. Attend one of our face-to-face classes (see schedule below)

OR

2. Go online: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/foodsafety/components/serveitupsafely.htm> and personalize your renewal. That's right --- when you go online to take the course you will choose four out of eight modules that are most useful for you and your establishment.

Class Schedule: Fall 2008

ServSafe® Certification

- **Thief River Falls**, September 25 & 26
- **Elk River**, October 6
- **Roseau**, October 9
- **St. Paul**, October 15
- **Marshall**, October 28
- **Aitkin**, November 6
- **Benson**, November 18
- **Mankato**, November 20
- **St. Paul**, November 20 & 21
- **St. Cloud**, December 2

Renewal

- **Thief River Falls**, September 24
- **Elk River**, October 6
- **Roseau**, October 8
- **Marshall**, October 28
- **Aitkin**, November 6
- **Benson**, November 18
- **Mankato**, November 20
- **St. Cloud**, December 3

For more class information: www.extension.umn.edu/foodsafety or
(507)337-2819 or schwa047@umn.edu