

Safe Handling Practices for Fresh Produce in Foodservice Operations

Julie A. Albrecht, Extension Food Specialist

This NebGuide discusses safe handling of fresh produce for those working in foodservice. Purchasing, storage, preparation, and service are some of the topics.

Foodservice workers can help ensure the produce they serve is safe by following safe handling practices.

Purchasing and Receiving

- Purchase food from known safe sources (reputable suppliers) and maintain its safety from time of receiving through service.
- When fresh produce is received, follow supplier recommendations, if provided, regarding handling, storage temperatures, “use by” dates, and other recommendations. Information on storing fresh fruits and vegetables is located at: www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/public/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=529
- Avoid receiving or using damaged or partially decayed produce.
- Maintain purchasing records of fresh produce or record the date of delivery on the produce cases upon receiving.

Storage

- Store raw produce so that it does not contaminate other foods with soil, etc.
- Store any fresh produce, whole or cut, where other products — especially raw meat and poultry — cannot cross-contaminate it.
- Segregate fresh produce from other refrigerated foods in refrigeration units by using a separate set of storage racks or separate cooler, if possible.

- Cover and store washed, cut produce above unwashed, uncut fresh produce.
- Store all produce off the floor. Remember to keep all foods at least 6 inches off the floor.
- The Nebraska Food Code (www.agr.ne.gov/regulate/daffdcode.htm) requires that melons and tomatoes, cut in any way, be held at 41°F or below. To maintain quality of other cut, peeled, or prepared fresh fruits and vegetables, refrigerate at 41°F or below or hold on a salad bar at 41°F or below. The Food Code states that food items stored at 41°F or below can be kept for up to seven days. For quality reasons, foodservice managers may choose to keep prepared produce for a shorter time in refrigeration units.
- Keep purchased prepared produce, such as shredded lettuce, chopped onions, etc., in its delivery container until needed.

Food Handler

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water before and after handling fresh produce.
- Avoid bare hand contact when preparing and serving fresh produce — use gloves, tongs, deli tissue, or other appropriate utensils.
- Make sure that foodservice employees who are ill do not work while sick.

Preparation

- Wash, rinse, and sanitize all sinks, utensils, cutting boards, slicers, and food preparation surfaces before use with fresh produce. If possible, designate specific cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce.
- Remove outer leaves, stems, and hulls from produce like cabbage, head lettuce, berries, and tomatoes.

- Always wash fresh produce under running, potable water before use. Use care in washing sensitive produce, such as berries, grapes, etc., and wash immediately before use.
- Do not use soap or detergent for washing produce as these products are not food grade. Washes that are designated for use with produce can be used but are not necessary for produce safety.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water. Scrub firm fruits and vegetables like potatoes and carrots with a vegetable brush under running tap water.
- Soaking or storing produce in standing water or ice is not recommended for most types of fresh produce.
- Commercial “fresh-cut” carrots, salad greens, and other produce have already been washed before processing and should be considered ready-to-eat with no further need for washing unless the label says otherwise.
- **Refrigerate foods prepared with fresh produce ingredients at 41°F or below.**
- Label and date all foods prepared with fresh produce ingredients. If not used within seven days, discard prepared fresh produce.
- Develop and follow a HACCP plan for fresh juices prepared onsite.

Service

- On self-serve and salad bars, use small batches of fresh produce and monitor the temperature of self-service units. Also, have employees monitor self-serve units for proper customer use.
- Fresh produce should not be held directly on ice.
- **New batches of produce should not be placed in containers that previously held produce.** Always remove the empty or near-empty container and replace it with a new container of the food item.
- Provide appropriate utensils for self-service of fresh produce.
- Do not re-serve freshly prepared dishes containing any raw produce, including dishes made with raw tomatoes, cilantro, and hot peppers, such as salsa and guacamole.
- Throw away fresh fruits and vegetables that have not been refrigerated (41°F or below) within four hours of cutting, peeling, or preparation.

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