



NEW ENGLAND EXTENSION FOOD SAFETY CONSORTIUM

GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

In the Barn/Packing House Sanitation

New England GAP Guidelines Addressed Here: *Sanitation in the Packing/Processing Facility*

- Approved sanitizers are used to sanitize food contact surfaces.
- Area and equipment are cleaned and sanitized at least once a day.
- Used and new packing containers are stored protected from contamination.
- A pest control system is in place.
- Produce waste is removed daily.
- Grounds are maintained in good condition.

The packinghouse can be a source of microbial contamination by people, animals and equipment. To prevent produce from being contaminated in the packing areas, maintain a cleaning and sanitizing schedule, keep all animals out and enforce worker hygiene.

Ideally the building used for packing and other post harvest operations should be constructed of materials that are easy to clean. The building should be designed to keep rodents and insects out. Counters, tables and other work areas should be made of materials that are easy to clean and sanitize such as stainless steel or other smooth, rust free, nonporous material. Plumbing fixtures should be capable of handling the crop, cleaning equipment and personal hygiene. Hot and cold water should be available with mixing sinks to allow for tempering the water.

It is a good idea to clean and sanitize packing areas, floors, equipment and food contact surfaces on a daily basis. A **food contact surface** is a surface that comes into contact with the fresh produce any time during harvesting, packing or transporting. In the packinghouse this would include counters, tabletops, racks, bins and utensils. **Cleaning** means to remove soil and residues from food contact surfaces by washing and scrubbing with soap or detergent, then rinsing with clean potable water. **Sanitizing** means to treat a food contact surfaces and floors with a sanitizing solution that will kill most microorganisms. Surfaces must be cleaned first before they can be sanitized. Soil and soap residues can inactivate the sanitizing solution. A **sanitizing solution** is made by mixing a small measured amount of a sanitizer with potable water according to the directions given by the manufacturer. A **sanitizer** is a chemical compound designed to kill microorganisms. Use only sanitizers approved for use with food contact surfaces. The most commonly used are chlorine bleach and quaternary ammonium compounds. These chemical compounds can be toxic when used improperly. Therefore always follow directions and be sure to label and store the chemical in a secure place away from work areas and all food. Workers who handle the sanitizer should be familiar with the **Materials Safety Data Sheet** for the product. This document will outline emergency steps to take if there is a spill or misuse of the product.

Take a walk through your facility and check for these signs of potential food safety hazards:

- Building used for livestock at any time
- Signs of rodent, bird or insect infestation.
- Holes in screens, windows and doors
- Chemicals stored near food or produce
- Food containers not labeled or dedicated for use
- Dirty, rusty and rough food containers, food surfaces, floors and equipment
- Containers stored on floor without covers
- Hoses used to wash food contact surfaces and equipment
- No hand-washing sink available
- No running hot or cold water available for cleaning
- Water supply from untested well or surface water
- Workers bringing in manure and dirt on clothing and footwear

What can you do?

- Remodel, clean and sanitize your building if it is or was used for livestock
- Install proper plumbing and fixtures to allow for hot and cold running water, mixing of water for cleaning and sanitizing.
- Use public water supply or tested and treated well water when cleaning and sanitizing in the packing room.
- Use food grade containers and store produce covered
- Screen and seal windows and doors to keep rodents, birds and insects out
- Invest in packing equipment, containers, utensils and food contact surfaces that are made of food grade materials and that are easy to clean and sanitize
- Set up a cleaning and sanitizing schedule for the floor, food contact surfaces, containers, equipment and utensils. Simply answer these questions:
 - What should be cleaned?
 - What sanitized?
 - When should it be cleaned and sanitized?
 - How should it be cleaned and sanitized?
 - Who should clean and sanitize it?
 - Who will monitor who, when, where and how?

Additional References and Resources:

Guide to Minimize Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/prodguid.html>

US Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration

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Food Safety Begins on the Farm: A Grower's Guide: Good Agricultural Practices for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

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