

Food Establishments

Environmental Health Division



Guidance for School, Community, and Food Establishment Gardens

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the majority of foodborne illnesses that occurred between 1998 and 2008 can be attributed to produce items, in particular leafy greens [1]. This document is intended to provide guidance on how to reduce the risk of foodborne illness associated with the handling and preparation of produce from a school garden, community garden, or a garden appurtenant thereto, where the final product is used in a permitted establishment in Maricopa County.

The Maricopa County Environmental Services Department does not prohibit consumption of produce grown in school, community, and restaurant gardens but strongly recommends that these products go through a thermal destruction/kill step (cooking) process to reduce the incidence of foodborne illness.

It is important to understand that the germs that cause foodborne illness may be present on the surface of raw fruits and vegetables. Establishments should carefully consider the types of produce to be harvested in order to facilitate the removal of contamination from the end product. For example, serving produce with a peel or rind (i.e. oranges, watermelon) versus other produce that can be difficult to clean and/or do not have a barrier for germs (i.e. leafy greens, strawberries). Cooking is a highly recommended method for effectively eliminating germs. This is particularly recommended for those produce products with a history of causing foodborne illness, such as leafy greens.

Please refer to the following resources for more information on handling requirements for produce:

Maricopa County Environmental Health Code

[Food Code References for Produce](#)

FDA: Raw Produce, Selecting and Serving It Safely

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/BuyStoreServeSafeFood/ucm114299.htm>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=WbhudxB3W-M

Other Resources:

Arizona Department of Health Services; Guidelines for School Gardens

<http://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/index.php#school-garden-program-home>

Arizona Department of Health Services, Preventing Poisoning Guidance

http://www.azdhs.gov/documents/licensing/childcare-facilities/providers/forms/poisoning_prevention.pdf

References:

[1] Painter JA, Hoekstra RM, Ayers T, Tauxe RV, Braden CR, Angulo FJ, et al. Attribution of foodborne illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths to food commodities by using outbreak data, United States, 1998–2008. *Emerg Infect Dis* [Internet]. 2013 Mar

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