**Tools for Farmers: Harvest**

**Find Harvest Related Produce Safety Rule standards** [**here**](http://foodsafety.uconn.edu/Home_Page/foodsafetystandardsof-psr.php)**.** (Harvest activities are addressed in Subparts C, D,E, I, K and L)

**Identifying the risks**

Harvest activities provide many opportunities for contamination of your product. Sources of contamination by disease causing microbes include dirty hands, gloves, cutting tools or harvest bins. In addition, if produce comes in contact with the ground, there could be a risk for contamination by soil that may contain manure/droppings from wildlife. You can reduce risks by assessing fields/harvest equipment/tools/ and worker cleanliness as you begin your harvest process.

**To assess your farm for worker health and hygiene risks answer the following questions:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Yes** | **I need to work on this** |
| 1. | Are harvest tools equipment and containers stored to prevent contamination? |  |  |
| 2 | Are harvest containers designated for harvest use only? |  |  |
| 3 | Are harvesting containers and tools, including knives and gloves that come into direct contact with produce, sanitized and/or cleaned as needed? |  |  |
| 4. | Do you assess production fields for the presence of wild animals prior to harvest? Have you trained workers to look for these risks and not to pick if there is concern for contamination? |  |  |
| 5. | Do you have a plan in place if there is evidence of animal intrusion (scat, manure, poop, damage to product, etc.) at harvest? |  |  |
| 6. | Are policies and practices in place so that drops are not harvested? |  |  |
| 7. | If you have field packing or washing facilities are they protected from animal contamination or do you have a plan to clean and sanitize before using? |  |  |
| 8. | Is water used in post-harvest activities is sourced from a tested well (no generic *E. coli* per 100 ml water) or a municipal water source? |  |  |
| 9. | Are trucks or trailers that are used during harvest cleaned prior to hauling produce? |  |  |
| 10. | Are trucks and other vehicles used in the field during harvest maintained so that they do not pose a risk for chemical or physical contamination? |  |  |

**If you answer any of these questions with “I need to work on this”, then you should consider ways to reduce food safety risks by working towards a “YES” answer.**

**What the Rule requires**

**Training and practice**

**Best harvest procedures**

* + Pre-harvest assessment of wildlife intrusion; condition of harvest bins, equipment, vehicles, portable rest-rooms and handwashing facilities; and hygiene of employees.
  + Only harvest produce that is not contaminated with animal excreta; has no signs of animal contact; and that is not dropped produce.
  + Handle harvested produce so that is does not contact soil or dirty, contaminated bins, equipment or vehicles.
  + If field packing, use packaging that is cleanable (and clean) or single-use and packaging that will not contribute to contamination of produce or growth of microorganisms on produce.
  + If water is used for harvest activities, it must meet the standards of no generic *E. Coli* per 100 ml of water).

**Employee training must address:**

* + Personal hygiene and harvest/relating to direct contact with edible produce
  + Using harvest containers only to harvest produce (not for trash or use as a stool, for example)
  + Inspection of harvest containers and equipment to ensure they are clean/in good condition prior to harvest
  + Recognizing which covered produce may not be harvested, including that with any signs of contamination by animal droppings or damage by wildlife and produce that has dropped to the ground
  + Inspection of packing materials if field packing is conducted—they should be new and/or cleaned and free of any dirt or contamination
  + Ensuring that any in-field packing tables or washing facilities are cleaned and sanitized before use
  + Inspection of vehicles used for transporting produce to ensure they do not contribute to contamination of produce

*Go to the* ***Training Page*** *for more information specifically about training regarding food-safe harvest practices.*

**What you might want to do in addition to the Rule**

It is always good to write things down. Consider writing a **food safety plan** or at least standard operating procedures (**SOPs**) or policies that address harvest practices. Writing the policies and procedures down ensures standardization of practices and provides a tool for employee education. Specific practices that might warrant an SOP or written policies are harvest bin and tool cleaning; written policies regarding inspecting bins, tools, vehicles prior to harvest; written policies regarding harvesting drops and visibly contaminated produce. The farmer could make employees aware of these policies during pre-season worker training.

**Tools for food-safe harvest practices**

**Sample record form for pre-harvest assessment (not required by PSR)**

Daily Pre-harvest Checklist

Link to PDF

**Sample record for cleaning and sanitizing equipment and tools (required by PSR)**

Cleaning and Sanitizing Record Template (RI)

Link to PDF

**Harvest procedures and SOPs**

Sample Harvest Container Cleaning SOP (Michigan State)

Link to PDF

Harvest and Field Sanitation Practices: Best Practices to Ensure On-farm Food Safety, LSU

Link to PDF

Minimizing Risk in Multiple-Use Containers, Trevor Suslow

Link to PDF