

# FRESH PRODUCE HANDLING TIPS FOR SCHOOLS

There are many resources available and already in place for food safety in the school food service program. You will find a sample for Standard Operating Procedures for washing fruits and vegetables and other resources for more in-depth food safety information.

## *Staying Healthy ... Staying Safe*

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet. Local farmers carry an immense variety of fresh fruits and vegetables that are nutritious and delicious.

As you enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables, it is important to handle these products safely to reduce the risks of foodborne illness.

## *Buying Tips for Fresh Produce*

You can help keep produce safe by making wise buying decisions with your local farmer.

- Purchase produce that is not bruised or damaged.
- Bag fresh fruits and vegetables separately from meat, poultry and seafood products.

## *Storage Tips for Fresh Produce*

Proper storage of fresh produce can affect quality and safety. To maintain quality of certain perishable fresh fruits and vegetables — such as strawberries, lettuce, herbs and mushrooms — store them in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40°F or below.

## Quick Tips ●●●●●●●●●●



All produce purchased pre-cut or peeled should be refrigerated to maintain both quality and safety.



Keep your refrigerator set at 40°F or below. Use a fridge thermometer to check!



## *Preparation Tips for Fresh Produce*

What About pre-washed produce? Many bagged produce items, such as lettuce, are pre-washed but usually need to be washed prior to use. As an extra measure of caution, you can wash the produce again prior to use. Pre-cut or pre-washed produce in open bags should be washed before using.

- ✓ Begin with clean hands. Wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before and after preparing fresh produce.
- ✓ Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing and/or eating. Produce that looks rotten should be discarded.
- ✓ All produce should be thoroughly washed before eating. This includes produce grown conventionally or organically at home, or produce that is purchased from a grocery store or farmers' market. Wash fruits and vegetables under running water just before eating, cutting or cooking.
- ✓ Even if you plan to peel the produce before eating, it is still important to wash it first.
- ✓ Washing fruits and vegetables with soap or detergent or using commercial produce washes is not recommended.
- ✓ Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush.
- ✓ Drying produce with a clean cloth towel or paper towel may further reduce bacteria that may be present.
- ✓ Separate for Safety Keep fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw separate from other foods such as raw meat, poultry or seafood - and from kitchen utensils used for those products.
- ✓ Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot water and soap between the preparation of raw meat, poultry and seafood products, and the preparation of produce that will not be cooked.
- ✓ For added protection, kitchen sanitizers can be used on cutting boards and counter tops periodically. Try a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach to one quart of water.
- ✓ If you use plastic or other non-porous cutting boards, run them through the dishwasher after use.