

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Warns about produce safety after a flooding event

Posted on Monday, Aug 27, 2018

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Release Date: August 27, 2018

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MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is warning produce growers and consumers about produce safety after a flooding event. “You should discard all produce that was touched by flood water unless you can confirm the water was not contaminated with sewage, river or creek water, farm run-off, or industrial pollutants,” said Dr. Steve Ingham, Division Administrator for the Division of Food and Recreational Safety. “Never sell produce from a flood-damaged garden at a farmer’s market. It typically takes at least one month after the last flooding incident for all contamination to be removed from the garden.”

With gardens in full harvest mode, growers should use the following guidelines for considering what must be discarded and what can be salvaged:

Discard all produce that is normally consumed raw or uncooked. This includes leafy vegetables and soft fruits that have ridges and crevices that are impossible to clean.

Evaluate produce that can be cooked or canned. While the heat of cooking or canning will reduce the risk of microbial food-borne illnesses, it will not eliminate the risk from industrial pollutants.

Evaluate produce that has not come into contact with flood water on a case by case basis. Produce with an outer impenetrable skin or husk that is removed may be suitable for washing with water and then sanitizing to reduce the risk of food-borne illness.

More information on evaluating produce safety after a flood can be found on the University of Wisconsin-Extension's horticulture website at <https://hort.uwex.edu/articles/safely-using-produce-flooded-gardens/>.

You should also check your well water for contamination. Well water contamination can occur if flood water enters the top of your well or migrates underground to your well from a neighbor's flooded well. If you normally use well water to clean produce, switch to a known safe source until your well is disinfected and you obtain a well-water test result indicating a safe water supply. More information about well water sampling kits and testing are available from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources at <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wells/flood.html>.

A list of DATCP resources for flood victims is available at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/Floods.aspx. Information about the flooding in Wisconsin and a complete list of resources statewide are available on the Wisconsin Emergency Management's website at <http://ready.wi.gov/flooding/AUG2018.asp>.