

Worker Hygiene and Training

Most watermelons are harvested or packed by hand. The health and hygiene of farm workers directly impacts the safety of watermelons since their hands can contaminate them as they handle them. The importance of the cleanliness of every worker's hands throughout all phases of production especially harvesting and packing cannot be over-emphasized. Educating workers about the risks, enforcing the use of toilets and hand washing facilities, paying close attention to the health of workers and encouraging them to report illnesses are a few simple steps growers can take to reduce the risk of pathogens being spread from workers to fresh watermelons. All workers, even your family members, should receive training.

Worker health also influences food safety. People who are ill or who have symptoms of nausea, vomiting or diarrhea can transmit harmful microorganisms to watermelons and should not handle them directly. Open or infected wounds, blisters or bleeding cuts also can transmit harmful pathogens to watermelons. Workers who have cuts or who have slight illnesses, but are healthy enough to work, should be assigned to non-produce contact jobs or provided with adequate bandages and gloves to reduce the risk of contamination.

An effective employee education and training program that explains the microbial risks associated with farm labor and highlights proper hand washing practices is essential to a comprehensive food safety management plan. This training should be in the language appropriate to the workers and the training information should be reinforced continuously. Providing accessible and clean restroom facilities with well-stocked hand washing stations is critical to encourage good worker hygiene. To ensure the use of these facilities, regular cleaning and maintenance should be scheduled. Hand washing should occur after using the restroom, before starting or returning to work and before and after eating or smoking. An effective worker health and training program will only occur with grower commitment and oversight.

Points of Interest

- Provide clean restrooms and washing facilities that include water, soap and disposable single-use hand towels.
 - These facilities should be in close proximity (within a ¼ mile or a five-minute walk) to the worksite
 - Maintain the cleanliness of facilities by keeping a checklist of when restrooms and washing areas are cleaned and document procedures for cleaning
 - Never clean portable toilets in the field; only clean them outside the field perimeter
 - Water used for hand washing needs to be fresh and not re-circulated.
- Do not allow animals (including dogs) in the field and do not allow grazing livestock near fields
- Do not allow workers to eat, drink, and chew gum or tobacco or smoke in or near the plant beds. Glass objects should not be inside the field perimeter
- Keep packaging materials in a clean and well-maintained area to avoid residue contamination by rodents, birds, etc. Do not leave packages on the soil; this could lead to contamination of the final product.



Management Area	Best Practice
Worker training on hand washing and personal hygiene for food safety	All workers attend regular training programs focused on good personal hygiene AND hand washing is emphasized daily AND language and training materials are appropriate for workers
Management of worker training programs on food safety and personal hygiene	Designated trainers on the management team are responsible for conducting training programs and provide consistent messages. These trainers keep records of frequency and attendance, assuring that all workers have received training at least one time each season. All managers act as role models by practicing proper hand washing
On-farm posted signage instructing workers of personal hygiene requirements	Signs are posted instructing workers to use toilet facilities AND to properly wash their hands after using the toilet, smoking or eating
Signage in appropriate languages or uses diagrams for non-English speaking or illiterate workers	Personal hygiene signage is provided in the appropriate language(s) or via diagrams for workers to read and understand
Worker illness reporting	Workers are required to report illness AND if ill, given non-food contact jobs AND supervisors have permission to reassign workers who appear to be ill Any worker illness should be well documented and maintained including any job reassignments
Record keeping of worker training	Records are kept documenting dates and attendance at training progress, as well as copies of all training materials