

# FOOD UNIT NOTICE

**SUBJECT:** Microbial Contamination of Fresh-Cut Fruits and Vegetables

**Notice Number:** 09.05

**Date of Issue:** 13/11/2009

## **Distribution of Notice:**

Fresh Produce (Processing and Retail) Industry and Local Government.

## **Purpose:**

This Notice is to advise fresh fruit and vegetable retailers of the best practices that will help control microbiological, physical and chemical hazards associated with the processing of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables.

## **Background:**

Consumer demand has resulted in an increased number of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables available on the market and the preparation of these products is now undertaken by retailers and food processors as well as by consumers in the home. Several food poisoning outbreaks have been associated with the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables both in Australia and overseas in recent years with the most recent involving Salmonella Saintpaul and papaya (paw paw).

The skin of fruit and vegetables may become contaminated either directly or indirectly from food handlers, animals, soil, manure and contaminated water or equipment. Certain commodities, such as rockmelons, are more likely to become contaminated due to being grown in close proximity to the ground and are harder to clean due to the uneven surface of their skin. Due to the low acidity of melons, which fails to inhibit bacterial growth, these products are also of particular concern.

These commodities are presented as ready-to-eat, and are unlikely to undergo further processing prior to consumption, such as cooking or fermenting, which would reduce the bacterial load. It has also been demonstrated that fruit becomes contaminated when cut, as bacteria from the surface of the fruit are transferred to the flesh. It is therefore important that they are handled and processed in a manner that reduces the likelihood of contamination.

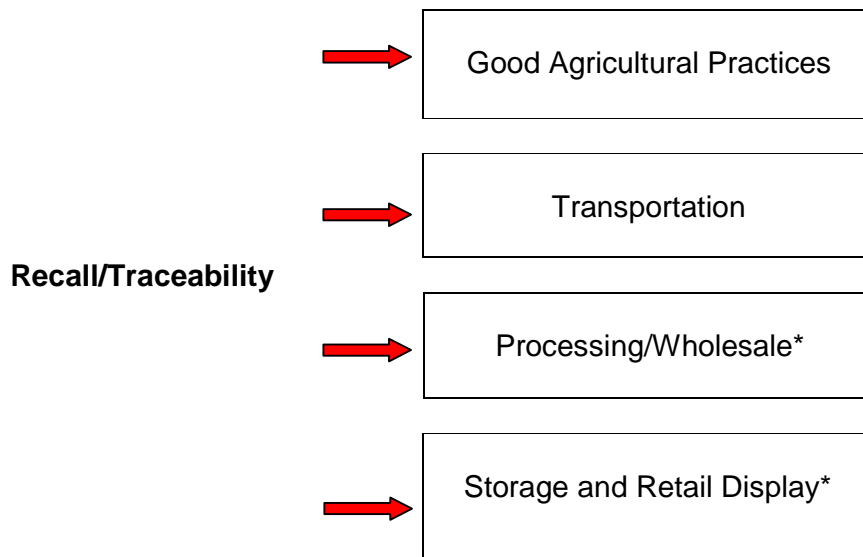
## **Preparation of Fresh-Cut Fruit and Vegetables**

- Wash whole fruit and vegetables with cool tap water before cutting. Scrub uneven surfaces (i.e. rockmelons) with a clean brush.



- Cut away damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruit and vegetables as bacteria can grow in these areas.
- Clean knives and cutting boards after cutting fruit and vegetables to avoid contaminating other food.
- Store cut fruits and vegetables under temperature control, either on ice or in a refrigerated unit.
- Implement an appropriate cleaning program of the equipment that comes into contact with the fruit. Environmental swabbing is a useful tool to help validate the effectiveness of cleaning programs.
- Bacteria, in particular *Listeria* species, persist in damp areas so food contact surfaces should be allowed to air dry after cleaning and sanitising. See the “*Cleaning and Sanitising*” Environmental Health Guide for further information (available on the Department of Health website).
- Adhere to any storage conditions specified on the label by the processor for example products such as Snow Pea and Bean Sprouts will be labelled with “Keep Refrigerated”.

## Food Safety through the Chain



\* In the event of a recall, you will need to be able to identify what products have been supplied by whom, especially if you source products from multiple suppliers

## Actions

- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable retailers, wholesalers and suppliers need to be aware of the added risk to certain fruit and vegetable products, in particular fresh-cut products.



- Local Governments are requested to assess practices within food businesses and provide advice as required.
- The DOH, in conjunction with the Department of Food and Agriculture and Local Government, will continue to work with industry to improve the standard of primary production of fruit and vegetables in Western Australia.

### Useful Resources and Websites:

- Department of Health WA: [www.public.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au)
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand: <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au>
- Codex Alimentarius: Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables  
[http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/standards/10200/cxp\\_053e.pdf](http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/standards/10200/cxp_053e.pdf)
- US FDA Guidance for Industry: Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables:  
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/GuidanceDocuments/ProduceandPlantProducts/ucm064574.htm>
- Food Science Australia: [www.foodscience.csiro.au](http://www.foodscience.csiro.au)

### Contact the Food Unit:

Any feedback or concerns please utilise the “Food Unit Query” form which can be downloaded from our website: [http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/786/3/food\\_informatio.pm](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/786/3/food_informatio.pm)

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*Note: The information contained in this document covers the food legislation requirements for Western Australia. It is current on the date of publication but may change without notice. The Department of Health is not liable for any costs arising from or associated with decisions based on information here and users should obtain expert advice to satisfy all requirements of the relevant food legislation applicable.*