



# Food safety is everyone's business

## in growing fruits and vegetables

### The importance of food safety

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of the human diet, and a good source of fibre, vitamins and minerals. However fruits and vegetables can become contaminated with noxious chemicals, such as agro-chemicals, natural toxins, heavy metals or microorganisms, such as *Salmonella* spp, *Listeria* spp or STEC, which can make people sick. The detection of chemicals or microorganisms in fruits and vegetables can have a negative

impact on trade and lead to product rejection and related economic and food losses. Between 2020 and 2022, approximately 15 percent of the international food safety events that required product recalls involved fruits, vegetables and legumes. Following regulations and using good agricultural practices is key to preventing foodborne diseases, improving health, enhancing food security and strengthening the economy.

### What are the benefits of food safety?

#### FOR PRODUCERS

- Better health for you and your family;
- Reduced product rejection and food loss;
- Better market access.

#### FOR CONSUMERS

- Access to nutritious foods in more places;
- Reduced foodborne illnesses;
- Better health due to reduced illness and improved nutritional status.



# How to achieve food safety in the horticulture sector

## PRODUCERS

**Use** water that is fit for purpose.

Assess the quality of the water and its suitability for the intended use such as irrigation, applying fertilizer, etc. Identify actions to prevent or minimize contamination, e.g. when irrigating. In hydroponic operations, the water quality should be maintained so as to reduce the risk of contamination and survival of pathogens.

**Prevent** microbial contamination from soil amendments.

Adequately treat faecal waste to reduce microbiological contamination, such as by composting, before using it as organic fertilizer. Avoid contact of soil/manure with edible parts of fruits and vegetables. Ensure adequate time between manure application and harvest.

**Control** plant pests and diseases.

Accurately diagnose and treat plant pests and diseases in a timely manner. Use chemical pesticides and antimicrobials prudently by adopting **Integrated Pest Management** approaches. Adequately manage chemical products to avoid contamination of soil, water sources and food.

**Keep** fruits and vegetable farms free from intrusion by animals.

Protect growing fields with fences. Growing areas should be located uphill or sufficiently far from livestock production sites. Remove trash from around the growing fields to keep animals away.

**Use** clean equipment and keep growing facilities clean.

Clean and disinfect all equipment used for harvesting and transporting fruits and vegetables. Ensure indoor growing areas are suitable, well drained and maintained and kept clear so as not to attract or harbour pests.

**Practise** good personal hygiene.

Wash your hands with soap and water before handling fruits and vegetables. Cover cuts, lesions and wounds with a glove or bandage. Use proper sanitary installations. When water is not available, use hand sanitizers such as alcohol or other similar products to keep hands clean.

## AUTHORITIES

**Make** knowledge available to producers to allow them to comply with food safety management programmes, including good agricultural practices (GAP) and good hygiene practices (GHP).

**Facilitate small-scale sustainable production of fruits and vegetables.**

**Adopt** legislation and promote the implementation of **Codex Alimentarius codes of practice and commodity standards** for fruit and vegetable production.

**Enforce** regulations and undertake routine farm inspections.

On World Food Safety Day (7 June), run a training or awareness-building session based on [WHO's Five keys to growing safer fruits and vegetables](#).