



Florida Tomato Committee

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Florida Tomato Industry Food Safety Program

Food safety is a top priority for the Florida tomato industry. Nothing is more important to Florida's tomato growers than the confidence of their customers in our product's quality and wholesomeness. Producers are committed to taking whatever proactive steps are necessary to ensure and enhance the safety of the food they produce.

Florida is the first state in the country to adopt a comprehensive food safety program with mandatory government inspection and audit for tomato handling, production and packing. These Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and Best Management Practices (BMPs) were adopted as state regulations, effective July 1, 2008.

- Highlights of the program include:
 - ◇ Annual registration of all packers and repackers of tomatoes in Florida, to be facilitated by county extension offices
 - ◇ Education, training courses and workshops on food safety practices
 - ◇ Regulatory inspections and audits by state inspectors with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)

The industry voluntarily voted GAPs and BMPs upon themselves in September, 2007; however, it took until April of 2008 for the state legislature to pass additional statutory authority for the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Food Safety Program and for the state to go through all the administrative procedures to adopt the final rule, making the GAPs and BMPs mandatory on July 1, 2008 as a government regulatory program.

Also available for download on the Florida tomato website is United's "Commodity Specific Food Safety Guidelines for the Fresh Tomato Supply Chain." This document is consistent with the Florida tomato regulations and audit standards and includes input from dozens of food safety and industry experts (U.S., Canada and Mexico) along the chain. The document addresses both whole and fresh-cut tomatoes, as well as all aspects of the supply chain. The Florida tomato industry supports efforts to make this document a necessary component of the supply chain.



**Florida Tomato Industry GAPs and BMPS (mandatory)
Commodity Specific Food Safety Guidelines for the
Fresh Tomato Supply Chain**
(available for download at www.floridatomatoes.org)



Background: Food Safety

In working with FDA, the state of Florida pulled together 7 eastern seaboard tomato producing states in late November, 2006 to share all food safety procedures, research activities and foodborne illness statistics. Those attending included FDA, Departments of Health, Departments of Agriculture, University researchers and industry representing about 85 percent of the U.S. production. Out of that forum, came a call for the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) to develop a model code for all states to be able to adopt if the federal government still had no mandatory regulations. AFDO expanded this from a model code or guidance for tomatoes to their current efforts to develop a model food safety code for all produce. Individual commodities will then have a more commodity specific guideline that will expand upon that. A second outcome of this forum was call for a national research prioritization workshop to gather researchers from around the country to identify and prioritize the gaps in scientific information that was impeding our food safety efforts.

In February, 2007, the Joint Institute of Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (JIFSAN) at the University of Maryland in partnership with the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) cosponsored a research workshop to identify these data gaps and to hopefully gain funding to fill the need. Researchers from California to Florida to New York worked through this process. A similar prioritization process for research for lettuce and leafy greens was done in January, 2008 and more recently for tree fruits.

For more information regarding fresh Florida tomatoes and food safety, please visit the Florida Tomato website at www.floridatomatoes.org.