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Cooperative Extension
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



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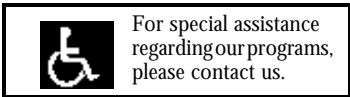
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SAFETY

During the month of May, the Central Valley counties of California see the first produce of the season reach maturity. It is a mouth-watering time to think of the fruits and vegetables that will soon be ready-to-eat. For many of us, fresh, local produce is something we look forward to each spring. And the spring of 2001 will be no exception. Food safety is also something that consumers will want to be aware of as well as we move into spring and summer.

When we discuss food safety issues, we must consider the important role each link of the food chain plays in ensuring a safe food supply. The entire chain includes growers, packers, shippers, food handlers, processors, retailers and consumers. If a link in that chain is broken, it threatens the safety and integrity of our food supply. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 97% of all traceable foodborne disease outbreaks result from improper handling and preparation of food. In fact, CDC data from 1983 - 1992 confirms the most common practice that contributed to foodborne disease outbreaks was improper holding and cooking temperature, followed by poor personal hygiene of food handlers both in the home and at commercial food preparation outlets.

As our society continues to demand more ready-to-eat and processed foods, consumers are spending less time in their kitchens. People are forgetting — or perhaps have never learned — basic food safety skills and practices that are essential when handling and preparing food. Consumers are encouraged

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to become more familiar with proper food handling and preparation practices. Consumers should understand those principles and apply them throughout the food consumption cycle from food purchasing to preparation to serving and storing the leftovers.

Here are a few basic food safety tips to remember: Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or handling food. Wash your hands before and after handling raw meat or poultry. Raw meat and poultry juices should never come in contact with foods to be eaten raw, such as salad items and fruits. Make sure all these items are properly refrigerated and stored. Cutting boards, knives, plates and other utensils that come in contact with raw meat should be cleaned thoroughly before being used again for any other food. Always wash fresh fruits and vegetables under cool running tap water before eating. Always cut away bruised or damaged areas.

California consumers are lucky to live in a state where food producers and growers are taking every measure possible to protect our food supply from pests and disease. When preparing foods, consumers should remember the important role they play in the entire food chain and do their part to ensure a safe, abundant and healthy food supply. For more information contact: Food Safety Information: Food Safety Hotlines by calling 800-675-2427 or 800-266-0200; the Centers for Disease Control at 800-311-3435 (consumers) or 404-639-3286 (media) or the California Department of Health Services by calling 916-657-3064. For more information about California agriculture products and food safety, contact the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) at their web site: <http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/foodsafety>.

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