

# Farm Stand and U-Pick Produce Operations Safety Best Practices



Inviting customers to your farm with a Farm Stand or U-Pick is a great way to engage the public and educate consumers about agriculture in general and specifically, where and how our food is produced. In addition, hosting farm visitors can lead to other business opportunities while providing consumers with fresh fruits and vegetables essential for a healthy diet.

However, inviting the public onto your farm brings additional concerns related to safety (humans and food) and liability. *You must make visitors aware of policies and procedures to protect covered produce and food contact surfaces from contamination by people and take all steps reasonably necessary to ensure that visitors comply with such policies and procedures.*

To protect your operation, it is important to work with your insurance provider to ensure adequate coverage is in place for all activities occurring on your farm. By implementing safety best practices, you can minimize risks and liability exposure. Many of these food safety best practices are the foundation for the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule, which is intended to increase the safety and quality of produce. There are many details!

This fact sheet is intended to help Farm Stands and U-Pick Produce Operators in reducing on-farm risks. Many of your visitors have *never* been to a farm, so you *must* communicate basic information [112.33(a)].\* Written communication through signage reinforced with verbal messages from staff demonstrate your commitment to safety. Other areas to address are those related to People or the Place.

## What signage do I need?

- Signs are an excellent way to communicate farm expectations and important information to visitors.
- Signs should have large neat print with short, easy to read messages. Bright backgrounds with dark and bold text are a great way to catch the attention of visitors.
- The location of the sign should be one that is unobstructed, for example not behind plant growth, and placed close to the target area for the message.

## People

### What do I need in a handwashing station?

- Handwashing stations are critical to ensure clean hands! Farm Stands that sell ready-to-eat food or allow petting of animals, and U-Pick operations must stress to visitors the importance of washing their hands before handling produce.



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## Wash Your Hands



- Handwashing stations must be available to visitors [112.33(b)].\* These must be kept stocked with potable water (this is drinking water, not water from a pond), soap (hand sanitizer is not a substitute for soap), paper towels, a catch basin or bucket for the wastewater, and a trash can (emptied regularly) nearby to encourage visitors to properly dispose of their paper towels. More information on how to build a portable handwashing station, including the need for a hands-free spigot, is available from the University of Minnesota Extension website ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/13GrrcM1sl8t\\_4VAmFURsNKSvW6zdEAS8/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/13GrrcM1sl8t_4VAmFURsNKSvW6zdEAS8/view)).
- Handwashing stations should be placed outside of restrooms if sinks are not available inside, at the entrance of a picking field, beside food stands, and by areas with animals.
- Graphics reminding how to properly wash hands are helpful for visitors.

### What about restrooms?

- A clean restroom must be available for your visitors to use [112.33(b)].\*
- Signs directing visitors to the restroom are best placed in multiple areas of a U-Pick, such as near the entrance and by purchasing stands.
- The restroom must be clearly identified – use of graphics can be helpful to non-readers.
- Restrooms, including portable toilets, should be cleaned daily and must be easily accessible by visitors and workers.
- Keep a restroom cleaning log, which includes dates and times of cleaning and restocking of toilet paper, soap and other supplies. This log also communicates to your customers that cleanliness is important to your operation – a marketing tool!
- Make it clear to visitors that diapers should be changed only in the designated areas.
- Sanitary trash receptacles should be provided.
- Toilets should not contribute a source of contamination to food or food contact surfaces; toilet waste should be well contained and not leak into fields.

### What kind of sick policy should I have?

- Many diseases are easily passed between people, animals, and/or objects through touching and through the air, such as norovirus, Hepatitis, *E. coli*, and others.
- It must be made clear to visitors and employees experiencing diarrhea, jaundice, or vomiting that they should not participate in on-farm activities [112.31(a)].\*
- Information regarding this policy should be posted in a sign at the entrance, or if admission tickets



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or wristbands are used, at the point of sale. This information should also be displayed on promotional material and the operation's website.

- Your healthy visitors will appreciate this attention to the control of illness!

#### How can I offer product samples?

- All fruit and vegetables should be washed before being consumed.
- In a U-Pick operation this is hard to control. Signage can help curtail eating unwashed produce with messages about nonpayment and/or health risks. For example a sign could read: "If you are eating in the field, you are eating our profits" or "For optimum safety, please wash produce before you eat it."
- If a Farm Stand is offering samples of cut produce, it must be kept at or below 41°F to avoid growth of harmful microorganisms (which grow very quickly in hot weather!).
- Samples should be prepared in a clean area and then stored in a protected cooler before offering to visitors. Samples should be kept protected during display with covers and pre-cut portions available.
- More information on sampling best practices is available on the [South Dakota State University Extension website](https://extension.sdstate.edu/guidelines-serving-samples-farmers-market) (<https://extension.sdstate.edu/guidelines-serving-samples-farmers-market>).

#### How should I handle money?

- Person(s) in charge of customer transactions involving money (particularly cash) should not directly handle produce, so jobs should be assigned strategically.
- If you have a one person Farm Stand, the worker must wash hands in between direct handling of money and produce [112.33(b)].\*
- Other options are for workers to handle produce with tongs, a deli tissue, or other clean utensil or having customers deposit cash payments directly into a suitable container.

## Place

#### Where to park?

- Use signage to direct customers to parking areas.
- If large crowds are expected at a U-Pick, having a designated person direct parking will decrease accidents and prevent contamination from vehicles leaking oil, grease, antifreeze and other chemicals onto fields.

#### What parts of the farm can I explore?

- You will want to restrict access to designated areas on the farm – for example, it is unlikely you want someone rummaging around in the area where pesticides are stored!

#### What about pets?

- Guests should be encouraged to leave all pets at home.
- However, some customers do require service animals. These animals need to be leashed and waste disposed of in designated trash cans.
- Product that is licked or otherwise contaminated by service animals should not be sold.

#### What about product containers?

- Customers should be provided clean picking containers.
- Reusable, plastic containers can be easily cleaned with potable water and detergent and then sanitized with a diluted bleach solution between uses.
- The Farm Stand and U-Pick operators maintain greater control of risks from indirect contamination of product (and product theft) if they provide containers rather than allowing customers to bring their own.

## Summary

**The public has better information about food production practices when they have opportunities to visit farms and engage in the process. This fact sheet provides some guidance on how to protect the public and your operation from risks.**

**More resources to help fruit and vegetable growers are available on the NCR FSMA website.**

- Store the containers in a protected, clean and covered area off the ground.

### How do we protect crops from wildlife?

- It is hard to control raw agricultural products from interaction with nature!
- Fencing and fence maintenance are best used to deter wildlife from entering growing fields; this protects produce safety, quality, and quantity!
- A daily field check should also be done of areas to be harvested.
- Areas of a field that show evidence of animal intrusion or contamination should be roped off and damaged product removed and not sold.
- In a U-Pick operation, encourage customers to notify you of any signs of animal presence or droppings in the field.
- A fact sheet on controlling wildlife in produce operations is available from the [NCR FSMA website](https://ncrfsma.org) (<https://ncrfsma.org>).

\* Information based on [FSMA Produce Safety Rule](https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/ucm334114.htm) (<https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/ucm334114.htm>)

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