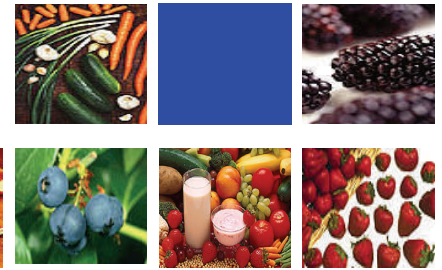


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In Focus with *Farm Worker Education: Impact on Fresh Produce Safety*

Farm worker hygiene is a crucial component of the fresh produce industry because workers harvest and pack many fruits and vegetables by hand. Their health and hygiene can directly impact the safety of the fresh produce they touch. In 2002, a survey of growers and packers in New York revealed that nearly 57 percent never mentioned the importance of hand washing to their farm workers. In turn, a survey of farm workers revealed that almost 45 percent believed that it was proper to put used toilet paper in adjacent trash cans rather than in the toilet. These surveys highlight the need for culturally relevant educational materials that teach the importance of proper worker hygiene during production and packing of fresh fruits and vegetables.



Farm workers are an extremely important part of the fresh produce industry.

As part of the National Good Agricultural Practices (GAPS) Program at Cornell University, an education program for farm workers has been developed. Its emphasis is on the production and distribution of multi-faceted educational materials that promote good health and proper hygiene for everyone involved in the production and packing of fresh produce. Using principles of adult learning, the educational materials have been designed to create a comprehensive worker training program that introduces information and then provides behavioral reinforcement of key topics. For instance, *Fruits, Vegetables, and Food Safety: Health and Hygiene on the Farm* is a 15 minute worker training video that offers guidance to workers on proper hand washing and toilet use, with emphasis on how worker health can affect the safety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Hygiene topics discussed in this video are reinforced with a series of laminated field hygiene posters.



Children outside of the farm worker development site.

Photo novellas (or photo novels) are a particularly effective educational tool among many cultural groups. A series of photo novels and a coloring book were designed for farm workers and their families. The *Did you know?* photo novel series discusses food safety topics through photographic stories with dialogue. In *Did you know? Your kitchen could be a source of illness!*, readers follow the Valdez Family as they learn the perils of foodborne illness and discuss food safety tips that help to prevent food contamination. In *Did you know? In the field there is a need for hygiene too!*, Carmello and Luis discuss their personal experiences, Paco's hygiene mishaps in the field, and their friend Lalo's illness. The photo novels are accompanied by a field hygiene manual entitled *Good Hygiene Protects Everyone*, that provides information about proper hydration and field sanitation practices. *The Fun Fruit and Very Vegetable Tour* coloring book was created especially for children of farm workers and follows three children as they learn about fruit and vegetable production, how germs are spread, proper hand washing, and why it is important to rinse fruits and vegetables before eating.

The coloring books are packaged in a clear vinyl envelope accompanied by a bar of soap, a washcloth, and crayons so children can engage in active play as they learn about proper hand washing.

Each of these educational materials can be used independently, but when used together, they provide a consistent message about the importance of good health and proper hygiene that is reinforced throughout all of the educational materials. Working with collaborators, this educational program has been distributed to growers, packers, health clinics, migrant education programs, and educators throughout the US.

For more information, please contact the National GAPS Program at www.gaps.cornell.edu, eab38@cornell.edu, or (315) 787- 2625.

For more information about the National Integrated Food Safety Initiative, contact Dr. Jan Singleton, National Program Leader, Food Science and Food Safety, at CSREES, USDA, 800 9th Street, S.W., Room 3434 Waterfront Centre, Washington, DC 20024-2220 (Phone: 202-401-1954; Fax: 202-401-9862; E-mail: jsingleton@csrees.usda.gov).

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