



Did you know . . .

Although uncut produce can usually be kept on the counter, as soon as you peel or slice produce it becomes a perishable food. Any leftover slices need to be stored in a covered container in the refrigerator within two hours of peeling or slicing.



Keeping It Safe at Farmers Markets

While farmers markets offer fresh, local foods, even locally-grown food can still be contaminated with *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and other pathogens. To get the most out of your produce, dairy and meat, it's important to know how to handle and prepare these items safely.

Produce can become contaminated from exposure to bacteria naturally found in the soil or water where the produce grows, or during the food storage and preparation process. In fact, 46 percent of foodborne illnesses are attributed to produce, compared to meat and poultry (22 percent) and fish and shellfish (6.1 percent)¹. The incidence of produce-related foodborne illness is high because produce is often consumed raw, so there is no final "kill" step for pathogens.

Below are some simple ways to stay safe while enjoying this season's fruits and vegetables.

- **Always wash your produce, even if you're buying local, organic or pesticide-free produce.** Research has shown washing with water to be just as effective as using veggie washes, vinegar solutions and detergents. Produce with firm skin like cantaloupes should be cleaned using a scrub brush. Soft-skinned produce should be rinsed under running water and patted dry with a clean paper towel.

Even produce that will be eventually peeled such as bananas or cantaloupes should be washed, as bacteria on the surface can easily be transferred to the edible sections when cut.

- **Inspect your food before buying it.** Make sure that the produce you purchase is not bruised or damaged. Make sure eggs are properly chilled, clean and not cracked.
- **Make sure meat is kept cold in closed, iced coolers.** Bring a cooler or insulated bag to keep your meat cold and separate from other fresh produce. You do not want juices from raw meat (which may contain harmful bacteria) to contaminate your other items.
- **When you get home from the farmers market, make sure to store your food items properly.** Produce stored in the refrigerator should not be stored near or under raw meat, seafood, poultry or eggs, while produce stored at room temperature should be kept away from non-food items like household chemicals.
- **Check the temperature in your refrigerator,** as one in four (25 percent) household refrigerators is too warm². Fresh meats and dairy products along with perishable fruits and vegetables need to be stored below 41 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **When cooking,** remember to always wash your hands and use separate cutting boards for produce and raw meat.

Consumers are the last line of defense in reducing the risk of foodborne illness by following safe food handling practices. Farmers markets are great, but it's important to remember that even locally grown food is at risk for contamination.

¹⁻² Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control 2013 food safety report