

Title A study of potential contamination through the production chain for salad mixes

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Abstract

Fresh vegetables and fresh-cut vegetable products have been the cause of serious food borne disease outbreaks in all developed countries in recent years. In many of these, contamination of the vegetables has been linked to on-farm practices such as the use of animal manure, low quality irrigation water and contamination from infectious workers. There have been recorded outbreaks in Australia linked to fresh produce including salad vegetables. Although there is a recognised food safety risk associated with fresh vegetables, there has been very little work done in Australia or elsewhere to assess and quantify the risk. The aim of this project was to carry out a microbiological survey of salad mixes destined to be sold to consumers as wash before use products. These are listed as category A (high risk) produce (grown on or in ground that are not cooked prior to consumption) in the DAFF Food Safety Guidelines for the fresh produce industry guide (2004). Four farms that produced salad mixes were investigated with 10 samples taken shortly before harvest, after harvest and after packing and delivery to retail. Contamination from the field was relatively low, this mostly declined further through the postharvest chain with the exception of one farm that washed in unsanitised water, the product showed increased levels of contamination at postharvest. The results suggest that a HACCP based QA system should be followed to reduce levels of contamination in the final product.