

Title The role of postharvest extension in ensuring food safety in the fresh cut industry
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Abstract

The fresh cut industry has seen a spectacular growth over the past 15 years. This growth has been based on many factors, perhaps the most important factor has been convenience and the expectation that the product is safe and ready to use. Fresh cuts however are classified by many authorities as high risk products and hence they require extra care in preparation to ensure that food safety expectations are met. Recent examples in the USA have shown what can happen to consumer confidence when fresh cuts are the source of food poisoning outbreaks. Outbreaks attributed to fresh cut spinach have resulted in a massive decline in sales as a consumer reaction to the negative publicity.

Fresh cut manufacturers have been increasing the emphasis they place on food safety at all stages of the production chain. Stricter food safety controls during processing, storage and transport are well within the control of the fresh cut industry and there are now many quality standards that take care of this aspect of the industry. On farm quality assurance however still poses a problem for the industry. Despite the introduction of Good Agricultural Practices based QA systems the industry has found the need to introduce agronomists/postharvest technologists to carry out extension programs to ensure that on farm food safety standards are met and maintained.