

Guidance To Assess Flood-Affected Crops and Resources for Food Safety

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture Produce Safety Program acknowledges many produce farms have crops in the field that may be impacted by flood water. We would like to offer the following guidance.

As rainfall occurs, to properly assess how your farm may have been impacted, it is important to understand the difference between flood water and pooled water. Flood water can be distinguished from pooled water, as described by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA):

“Flooding is the flowing or overflowing of a field with water outside a grower’s control. Pooled water (e.g., after rainfall) that is not reasonably likely to cause contamination of the edible portions of fresh produce is not considered flooding.”

FDA also offers the following guidance on crops and commodities exposed to flood water: *“If the edible portion of a crop is exposed to flood waters, it is considered adulterated... and should not enter human food channels. There is no practical method of reconditioning the edible portion of a crop that will provide a reasonable assurance of human food safety. Therefore, the FDA recommends that these crops be disposed of in a manner that ensures they are kept separate from crops that have not been flood damaged to avoid adulterating ‘clean’ crops.”*

This applies to all food crops including:

- Surface crops such as leafy greens, tomatoes and peppers
- Underground crops such as peanuts, garlic, and carrots
- Crops with a hard-outer skin such as pumpkin, watermelon and winter squash
- Commodities such as grains, nuts, corn, and similar products stored in bulk

Additional guidance for evaluating the safety of flood-affected food crops for human consumption can be found on FDA’s website:

<https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-evaluating-safety-flood-affected-food-crops-human-consumption>.

You can also visit the flood resource page of University of Tennessee Extension for more information: <https://utianews.tennessee.edu/university-of-tennessee-extension-offers-resources-to-aid-flood-recovery-efforts/>.