A continuous and well organized daily, weekly or monthly environmental monitoring plan is a critical component for any food safety program.

Regardless of the size or the number of personnel (even if there are just a couple of operators), every farm must have one or multiple people who are trained and in charge of monitoring the safety procedures, such as cleanliness of toilets and hand-washing stations, proper hand-washing, proper sanitizing and so forth.

**Packing Area Cleaning and Sanitizing**

Fresh produce packing areas may be open or closed to their outside surroundings. All product received in the packing area must be handled properly and stored in a clean and sanitized area.

Produce must be inspected for damage, insects, decay, visible chemical residue and so forth. The products also must be sorted, graded and sized, if applicable, before packing.

- Water used in the washing and packing area must be potable. The temperature of water used in dump tanks, flumes and so forth must be monitored and should be no more than 10 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than the interior of the produce to prevent pathogens from entering the produce.
- As much as possible, field soil attached to harvesting containers should be removed before produce enters the packing area for cleaning, washing, sorting, sizing and waxing/drying.
- Glass lights above packing and sorting areas must have protective covers.
- Air ducts, rafters and ceilings above the packing area should be dust and debris free. Packing and sorting equipment, as well as scales, must be inspected before use to make sure there are no broken pieces or sharp edges that may bruise or injure the produce. All repairs must be made before the equipment is used.
- Packing and sorting equipment must be washed and sanitized before each use.
- Any lubricants, cleaners and sanitizers used to maintain packing and sorting equipment must be food-grade supplies.
- Any cleaners and sanitizers used to wash storage containers or produce must be food-grade and registered with the EPA. For more information on these sanitizers, consult the Southeastern U.S. Vegetable Crop Handbook ([www.thepacker.com/grower/2015-southeastern-us-vegetable-crop-handbook](http://www.thepacker.com/grower/2015-southeastern-us-vegetable-crop-handbook)).
• Flaking paint or damaged spots in the packing area must be repainted or treated immediately to eliminate the physical contamination of foods (flakes, rust, etc.).
• Doors providing access to packing/production areas must be kept closed when not in use.

Waste Control
A program for structural cleaning, emptying bins and waste collection must be in place on every farm to minimize the accumulation of waste in packing areas.

Containers
Policies and procedures must be in place outlining:
• Use of new or sanitized containers when packing produce.
• Proper storage of pallets and packing containers.
• A sanitation schedule for reusable plastic containers.

Pest Control
• A pest control program must be in place in the packing area.
• Any containers used for packing or shipping must be stored so rodents do not come into contact with them. Containers must be covered so they are protected from dust and animal feces and they must be stored on a rack at least 6 inches above the ground and 3 inches away from the wall.
• Prior to any produce leaving the farm on a truck, the truck must be inspected for proper temperature and cleanliness, as well as any evidence of rodents/insects or any debris.
• Walls, floors, ceilings and pipes must be maintained in good condition, sealed and kept clean.
• If windows are designed to be opened for ventilation, those windows must be screened to prevent pests from entering.

Worker Health and Hygiene in the Packing Area
Toilet and hand-washing facilities must be checked daily to make sure they are clean, sanitized and well stocked. Workers must be trained on proper hand-washing procedures and other health and personal hygiene practices.

If it is part of the farm’s policies, all employees and visitors must wear hats and/or hair nets (and beard and mustache covers, if applicable). Jewelry should not be allowed while working with food.

Traceability
All the records for incoming products and outgoing products must be kept so it’s possible to trace any contamination.

References
United Fresh Produce Association, 2013. Guidance on Environmental Monitoring and Control of Listeria for the Fresh Produce Industry, Developed by the United Fresh Food Safety and Technology Council.
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