MEMO: Flood-Affected Produce – Food Safety Guidance for Growers and Supply Chains

Date: 25 July 2025

From: Fresh Produce Safety Centre Australia & New Zealand (FPSC-ANZ)
To: Tasman Region Growers and Supply Chain Partners

Summary: Following recent flooding in parts of the Tasman region, there is a high risk of contamination in affected crops.

- This memo draws on FPSC Guidelines and MPI NZ Food Safety (NZFS) guidance to help growers make informed decisions about flood-exposed produce.
- Please assess food safety risks carefully. Avoid harvesting flood-affected crops where contamination cannot be ruled out. Refer to the guidelines below for specific actions.
- If the edible part of a crop has been in contact with floodwater, it must be discarded. Floodwaters can carry dangerous microbes, chemicals, and debris that cannot be removed by washing or cooking.

Our collective goal is to protect consumer safety and maintain trust in New Zealand's fresh produce by preventing contaminated crops from entering the supply chain.

- Floodwaters may contain sewage, fuel, pesticides, heavy metals, and pathogens such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, or viruses. These can contaminate produce even if exposure is brief.
- Follow the FPSC and NZFS guidance based on risk assessment and best practice

What You Should Do

If the edible portion of the crop was touched by floodwater:

- **Do not harvest or consume it.** This includes leafy greens, root vegetables, fruit, and vine crops.
- **Do not rely on washing, peeling, or cooking** to remove contamination – these are not considered effective enough.
- **Destroy all affected produce** to prevent cross-contamination.

If the edible portion was not in contact with floodwater:

- Wait **at least 2 weeks after the flood event** before harvesting.
- Discard any fruit or vegetables that are **bruised, cracked, soft, or split**, as contaminants may have entered.

Consideration of additional food safety measure

- Maintain a **10-metre buffer zone** between flooded and unaffected crops to reduce cross-contamination risk.

Testing and Risk Assessment

- Testing (e.g. for *E. coli*) can support decision-making for non-submerged crops, but is **not sufficient on its own**.
- Instead, base decisions on a **comprehensive risk assessment**, including:
  - Crop type and maturity
  - How close edible parts are to the soil
  - Water source safety (especially for post-flood irrigation or washing)
  - Potential for mycotoxins from prolonged wet conditions

Post-Flood Hygiene

- **Sanitise equipment, bins, hands, and surfaces** regularly to prevent spreading contamination.
- Clean water used for irrigation or washing must be assessed for safety.
- Consider communication with retailers about safe handling and preparation of unaffected produce.

Resources

- **NZFS Guidance for Harvesting Flood-Affected Produce**
  https://www.mpi.govt.nz/funding-rural-support/adverse-events/food-safety-in-natural-disasters-and-emergencies/guidance-for-harvesting-flood-affected-produce-for-human-consumption/
- **Food Safety in Natural Disasters**
  www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-home/food-safety-in-natural-disasters-and-emergencies
- **FPSC Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety (2022)**
  Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide guidance on managing risk related to site, soil, and water contamination.
  https://fpsc-anz.com/food-safety-guidelines-2022/

Need help?

Contact FPSC at: technical@fpsc-anz.com
Or call MPI Food Compliance: 📞 0800 00 83 33

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