

## **E. coli Outbreak Raises Cleaning Questions In Industry**

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Now that health officials and the produce industry have begun the investigation to identify the sources of multiple E. coli outbreaks in spinach, there are steps the produce and food service industries, as well as consumers, can take in the future to help protect themselves, said Todd Wichmann, chemical engineer and president of HealthPro Brands, maker of FIT Fruit and Vegetable Wash.

"As we've heard, the current produce industry washing procedures (with low levels of chlorine solutions) do not kill the E. coli once it makes contact with the leaf. And of course the FDA had, until recently, advised consumers to wash produce with water alone at home. We now know that doesn't work," said Wichmann. "We need to find a way to ensure consumers can have confidence in food safety so they are able to eat more produce, not less. Clearly the industry is making this their number one priority and we agree with that and think we can help."

Wichmann said regulators, growers, processors, restaurants, and consumers too, need to place more attention on the "kill steps" in their processes and habits when washing and processing fresh produce.

### **Industry Practices**

It is widely known that fresh cut produce processors use chlorine bleach or chlorine dioxide to wash produce. However, as the FDA has acknowledged, bacteria can be tightly attached to produce and the current guidelines are not designed to kill the E. coli on the produce itself. Wichmann said FIT's commercial produce wash can help overcome that problem when washing fresh cut and other processed produce. FIT helps provide the much needed "kill step" the industry is not currently practicing.

The ingredients in FIT, specifically its natural surfactants, act as "wetting agents" which are designed to lift off and kill the pathogens on processed produce. FIT is able to get into "nooks and crannies" that other washing systems may not do.

FIT's commercial formula has been found to be effective in killing 99.9 percent of bacteria, including E. coli, Salmonella and Staphylococcus aureus associated with food-borne illnesses on processed produce.

FIT is made from all natural and every day food ingredients, such as citric acid and grapefruit oil. It rinses away clean and, unlike chlorine, leaves no aftertaste or smell. Wichmann said FIT also cleans faster than chlorine, saving energy, time and water for industry users.

"We found it works better than chlorine," said Sandy Watts of Mundo Exports, a Texas-based mango importer who has been using FIT to wash and sanitize mangos and flowers sold to the floral industry. "Chlorine dissipates too fast, but this pH-balanced product lasts longer," he said. "Another advantage is that it is more environmentally friendly than chlorine," said Watts. Furthermore, the U.S. Army has been ordering FIT to help clean and sanitize produce in Iraq.

### **What Consumers Can Do In the Future**

Following this current outbreak period, Wichmann suggests FIT at home for consumers, which is

available in select grocery stores or can be located on <http://www.fitwash.com>. Consumers and businesses can also purchase FIT online. FIT also makes the produce look, smell, and even taste better, according to Wichmann.

### Food Facts

Consumers are eating more produce, much of it raw and pre-packaged. The Food and Drug Administration estimates that 40 to 50 percent of produce consumed by Americans is imported, with as much as 75 percent of fresh fruits and vegetables harvested beyond U.S. borders in the winter. Only two percent of the food imported annually is inspected. And produce is typically handled multiple times before it reaches our dining room tables.

### More About FIT

FIT Fruit and Vegetable Wash removes up to three times more chemicals and residues than washing with water alone. The product underwent extensive testing in its own laboratories and by an independent laboratory. A comparison of the effectiveness of FIT versus water was conducted by applying commonly occurring residues to popular fruits and vegetables.

Some substances, notably wax, are water-insoluble and cannot be adequately removed with water alone. Unlike soap products, FIT is completely safe and natural and has been specially formulated for use on produce. FIT's formula rinses away with water, leaving behind the true flavor and goodness nature intended.

FIT was originally developed by Procter & Gamble in 2000 and was sold to HealthPro Brands Inc. in 2006. FIT is the only produce wash certified Kosher and recommended by the American Vegetarian Association. More information can be found online at <http://www.fitwash.com/>.

FIT Fruit and Vegetable Wash  
<http://www.fitwash.com/>

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