CLEANING FOR FOOD SAFETY ON THE FARM

Cleaning and sanitizing are important practices to keep food safe and prevent foodborne illnesses. Implementing frequent cleaning and sanitizing procedures will help maintain the safety of your produce.

CLEANING IS THE REMOVAL OF SOIL, DEBRIS, AND OTHER CONTAMINATION FROM THE SURFACES OF OBJECTS.

Cleaning usually uses detergent and a clean brush to scrub dirt from a surface. On some farms, dry cleaning using brushes, vacuums, or blowers may be better and safer because adding water to a dry process can allow germs to grow and increase the risk. If water is used, it should be clean (free of detectable E.coli).

DRY CLEANING INVOLVES REMOVING VISIBLE SOIL AND OTHER DEBRIS FROM THE SURFACE AND THEN APPLYING AN ALCOHOL-BASED SANITIZER APPROVED FOR FOOD-CONTACT SURFACES.

Dry cleaning is better for packing areas where the use of water can increase the growth of germs. Dry cleaning is commonly used in berry and nut production. It can also be used for equipment that would not have a chance to dry before being used again, since equipment that does not dry completely could grow germs between uses.

SANITIZING IS THE PROCESS OF LOWERING THE NUMBER OF GERMS ON SURFACES TO A SAFE LEVEL.

Soil, dirt, and contamination can reduce the efficacy of sanitizers, so it is important to remove them by cleaning and rinsing a surface before you apply the sanitizer. If you dry clean, then it is important to use an alcohol-based sanitizer that will evaporate quickly. Food contact surfaces should be both cleaned and sanitized in that order.
The best tools to use for cleaning are made from materials that do not absorb or hold water. For example, a plastic brush is usually a better cleaning tool than a sponge because the plastic brush will not hold water and will dry more quickly. Stainless steel and plastics like PVC or vinyl allow for effective cleaning while reducing contamination from soils, food debris, and gerns. Porous materials, such as wood, cardboard, carpet, foam, and cloth are harder to clean and they can retain moisture which can allow gerns to grow.

Cleaning and sanitizing is a multi-step process that involves removing visible debris, cleaning with a detergent, rinsing, sanitizing the surface, and air drying. Always use sanitizers that are approved for food-contact surfaces.

Basic cleaning and sanitizing steps:

1. REMOVE SOIL
2. WASH SURFACE WITH DETERGENT
3. RINSE SURFACE WITH CLEAN WATER
4. PREPARE SANITIZING SOLUTION
5. APPLY SANITIZING SOLUTION ON SURFACE
6. ALLOW SURFACE TO AIR-DRY

Food Contact Surfaces on Your Farm

A food-contact surface is any surface that will contact your produce, including tools or pieces of equipment used on your farm. Your farm will have many food contact-surfaces, including field packing equipment, sorting tables, conveyors, wash tanks, cartons, baskets, and bins. Smaller pieces of equipment, such as utensils, knives, scissors, aprons, and brushes are also food-contact surfaces.

To identify food-contact surfaces on your farm, observe the direction that your produce takes from harvesting to shipping or from harvest to sale and pay attention to each surface that touches your produce. The surfaces that produce directly touches are areas that should be prioritized for cleaning and sanitizing.

Additional Resources