

## Food Safety Notice

February 9, 1999

Traditionally fresh produce has been displayed and sold in retail markets without special methods to protect it from contamination by consumers. It is not unusual to observe shoppers pick up whole, intact, fruits or vegetables in their hands, squeeze them, and sniff them before making a selection. Even though Section 114010<sup>1</sup> of the California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law (CURFFL) requires that food be protected from contamination, this practice has been allowed because fresh produce in this form is not sold as "ready-to-eat." Consumers know that fresh produce must be washed before consumption.

It has become increasingly common to find "value added" produce offered for sale. "Value added" means that some preparation steps are performed before sale as a way of increasing convenience and saving time for the consumer. Examples of these types of products are cut melons, salad mixes (packaged and unpackaged), peeled vegetables, etc. Protection from contamination for these products is more complex than for traditional fresh produce.

### **Cut Melons**

Cut melons, including watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew, etc. are potentially hazardous foods as defined in CURFFL. They must be held at temperatures of 41 degrees F or below. They must be prepared in an approved food preparation area with appropriately cleaned and sanitized food contact surfaces and utensils. Personal hygiene requirements including handwashing should be enforced. Cut melons are "ready-to-eat" and must be protected from contamination while being displayed.

### **Packaged Salad Mixes**

Bagged salad mixes may contain a variety of mixed greens including cabbage, lettuce, spinach, and chopped or sliced vegetables. Sometimes packets of salad dressing and condiments are included. Although refrigeration is usually provided for these products, they are not considered potentially hazardous foods unless the product is labeled "Perishable - Keep Refrigerated." Refrigeration serves primarily to extend shelf life and maintain product quality. Preparation instructions may be provided by the packer, but are not legally required. "Ready To Eat" or "Wash Before Serving" may appear on the package. Consumers are advised to wash all produce which is not labeled as "ready-to-eat" or which contains an advisory to wash before consumption.

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#### **<sup>1</sup> 114010. (27603) Food Must Be Protected**

All food shall be prepared, stored, displayed, dispensed, placed, transported, sold, and served as to be protected from dirt, vermin, unnecessary handling, droplet contamination, overhead leakage, or other contamination.

## **Bulk Sale of Peeled, Sliced, and Cut Vegetables and Salad Greens**

Peeled, sliced, and cut vegetables and salad greens may be sold from bulk containers in the produce section. Peeled carrots, broccoli and cauliflower florets, sliced mushrooms and other vegetables may be offered in this manner. Adequate protection from contamination during display depends upon the circumstances under which they are offered for consumption. These products are not potentially hazardous foods unless labeled **Perishable - Keep Refrigerated.**"

Peeled carrots, broccoli and cauliflower florets, mushrooms and salad greens may be displayed in the traditional manner, that is, without "sneeze guards" and unpackaged provided that:

1. Prominent signs declaring "Wash Before Eating" or similar words accompany the produce in the display case.
2. No utensils including tableware, dishes, take-out containers, and napkins are displayed adjacent to the produce. Tongs or similar utensils may be provided to help consumers select items for placement in produce bags.
3. No unpackaged salad dressing or salad condiments (croutons, spices, bacon bits, cheese, etc.) are displayed adjacent to produce.
4. No salad bar offering similar produce is located in the produce display area.

Fruits and vegetables which appear ready-to-eat (unpackaged, peeled, cut, sliced) and which do not comply with all of the requirements above must be prepared and displayed to prevent contamination. This shall include sneeze-guard protection, provision of sanitized serving utensils, sanitized food contact surfaces, and appropriate personal hygiene precautions by food handlers.