
Editorial

Fresh produce safety: A growing concern

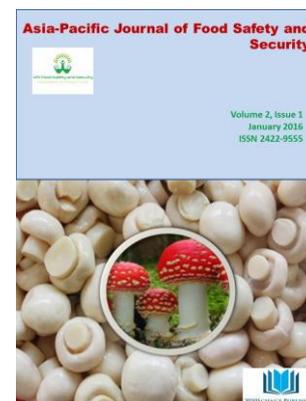
Malik Altaf Hussain

Department of Wine, Food and Molecular Biosciences, Lincoln University,
Lincoln 7647, New Zealand

Corresponding author email address:

malik.hussain@lincoln.ac.nz

Received: February 15, 2016 / Accepted: March 1, 2016 / Published online: March 25, 2016



To cite this article:

Hussain MA. (2016) Fresh produce safety: A growing concern. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Food Safety and Security*, 2(1): 1-2.

The general public perception around the occurrence of foodborne illnesses and outbreaks is due to so called high-risk foods. Poultry, egg, dairy, meat and fish products are regarded as high-risk foods when it comes to food safety. Other foods, like cereals, fruits and vegetables, are considered a part of a healthy diet and safe commodities. Undoubtedly, fresh produce, comprised of fruits and vegetables, plays an important role in the human diet because of its health-promoting nutritional properties. Interestingly, recent reports suggest that foodborne outbreaks and cases associated with fresh produce have risen significantly. According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), the highest number of outbreaks in the US was attributed to produce as a single commodity during 2002-2011 (CSPI 2014). Thus, the emphasis on fresh produce safety is growing globally.

Some recent examples of fresh produce contamination incidents are:

- 2014: An outbreak of *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis* was suspected due to fresh produce contamination in New Zealand. There were 217 cases with 65 hospitalisations.
- 2014: An outbreak of Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* O121 infections was linked to raw clover sprouts in the US. There were 19 cases with 44% hospitalisations.
- 2015: An outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* was linked to caramel apples in the US and Canada. There were three deaths and more than 30 hospitalisations.
- 2016: An outbreak of *L. monocytogenes* due to contaminated pre-packaged salad products in the US and Canada. There were 18 cases with 18 hospitalizations and one death.
- 2016: An outbreak *Salmonella* linked to lettuce in pre-packaged salads in Australia. There were more than 100 cases throughout the country, with the majority of them being in Victoria.

Now, the food safety of fresh produce is a matter of increasing concern, and there are some key factors to understand it. Fresh produce is at risk of microbial contamination during any stage of the supply chain. It is mostly consumed in raw or minimally processed form, which increases health risk due to potential pathogenic contamination. Factors such as changes in the food consumption pattern, health food choices, an aging population, and globalized fresh produce trade are contributing to the complexity of this emerging food safety challenge.

Emerging new issues with the production, sale and consumption of fresh produce will change the public perception of safety concerns. Improvements in food safety standard requirements in relation to fresh produce are seen in different parts of the world. Buyers are now requiring that suppliers of fresh produce provide conformance certification to some accepted standard. The American Food Safety Modernization Act 2011 is expected to bring major changes to food safety in the produce industry. It is hard to suggest a prescriptive single response to address all potential fresh produce incidents; however, the enforcement of guidelines would be useful in dealing with this challenge.

References

1. CSPI. (2014) A review of foodborne illness in America from 2002-2011. Center for Science in the Public Interest; Sixteenth Edition, April 2014.

© 2016 by the author; licensee 2050Science Publishers, Christchurch, New Zealand. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.