



State of Arizona
Department of Education

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MEMORANDUM

To: National School Lunch Program and Food Distribution Program Sponsors

From: Mary Szafranski, Deputy Associate Superintendent
Arizona Department of Education, Health & Nutrition Services

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Date: January 18, 2012

RE: Food Safety Guidelines for School Gardens

Food safety is an important aspect of the Child Nutrition Programs both inside and outside of the kitchen. In the past, school garden produce has been deemed an unapproved source by local health authorities for service in school meals due to the Arizona Food Code. With increased interest in school gardens, the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) has developed food safety guidance for school gardens. This guidance should be followed if the school intends to use the produce grown in the school garden for consumption in school meals. This guidance is located online at: http://www.azed.gov/diro/admin_rules/guidance_PHS_BEDCS.htm

To assist school food authorities (SFA) in incorporating these new guidelines, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) has created a Food Safety Plan to be used as a tool for food safety best practices in the school garden. An electronic version of the Food Safety Plan can be located on the ADE website.

Q: Why is food safety important to consider when gardening for young children?



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A: Young children along with the elderly and those with impaired immune systems, are considered a vulnerable population. These populations are more susceptible to food borne illnesses caused from contaminated foods. Applying best practices in school gardening is essential in preventing food borne illnesses in school meals.

Q: Who is the “local health authority”?

A: According to the Arizona Food Code, the local health authority is defined by the ADHS as the county health department. Please contact your local health department for additional guidance.

Q: Are these guidelines mandatory if the school garden is used solely for educational purposes and not for consumption?

A: No, these are guidelines based off of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Good Handling Practices and Good Agricultural Practices certification which are for produce intended for consumption. It is the responsibility of the school food authority to ensure that when produce is used in the school kitchen that they are following all county health department regulations and policies.

For questions about school gardens, please contact the ADE at (602) 542-8700.

