Microbiology of Fresh Produce
Emerging Issues in Food Safety
SERIES EDITOR, Michael P. Doyle

Microbiology of Fresh Produce
Edited by Karl R. Matthews

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Microbiology of Fresh Produce

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Contents

Contributors vii
Series Editor’s Foreword ix
Preface xi

1 Microorganisms Associated with Fruits and Vegetables 1
Karl R. Matthews

2 Role of Good Agricultural Practices in Fruit and Vegetable Safety 21
Elizabeth A. Bihn and Robert B. Gravani

3 Biology of Foodborne Pathogens on Produce 55
Ethan B. Solomon, Maria T. Brandl, and Robert E. Mandrell

4 Postharvest Handling and Processing: Sources of Microorganisms and Impact of Sanitizing Procedures 85
Jorge M. Fonseca

5 Microbiological Safety of Fresh-Cut Produce: Where Are We Now? 121
Arvind A. Bhagwat
6 Seed Sprouts: the State of Microbiological Safety 167
   William F. Fett, Tong-Jen Fu, and Mary Lou Tortorello

7 Consumer Handling of Fresh Produce 221
   Christine M. Bruhn

Index 233
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Series Editor’s Foreword

This is the first book in a new series of monographs that will address emerging topics of the microbiological safety of foods. Reports of estimates of tens of millions of cases of foodborne illness in the United States annually indicate the magnitude of this problem. Epidemiologists report that in the United States foodborne illnesses are more common than influenza or the common cold. Microorganisms or their metabolites are responsible for the vast majority of foodborne illnesses, but there are many unknowns regarding disease agents, including their epidemiology, mechanisms of pathogenicity, infectious or toxic dose, host sensitivity, detection and subtyping methods, and treatments for inactivation. Microbiologists continue to unravel these mysteries, often renouncing age-old beliefs that were long considered dogma. Hence, the need exists to provide scientists interested in the microbiological safety and quality of foods a medium for an authoritative presentation of seminal issues of major significance to the field.

Fresh produce consumption in the United States is increasing at a dramatic rate, more than doubling over the past two to three decades. Concomitant with this has been a substantial increase in the importation of fruits and vegetables and in the incidence of foodborne illnesses associated with fresh produce consumption. An incredible amount of new information has been published during the past few years addressing the microbiological safety of fresh produce. In some instances, questions have been raised regarding long-held dogmas, an example being that the internal contents of intact fruits and vegetables are sterile. Recent reports have dispelled this principle with experimental findings revealing that tomatoes and lettuce can be internally contaminated by harmful microorganisms, depending on
growing and processing conditions. Therefore, it is most fitting that the first monograph in this series focuses on this important and timely topic.

My compliments to Karl Matthews and his team of coauthors who have been truly remarkable in pulling together in record time the state-of-the-art information regarding the microbiological safety of fresh produce. Well done.

Michael P. Doyle, Series Editor
Emerging Issues in Food Safety
The microbiological quality of fresh fruits and vegetables is essential to ensuring the availability of a high-quality, safe product for the consumer. Consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is an important part of a healthy diet, supplying much-needed vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Health promotion aspects of fruits and vegetables are beginning to be widely acknowledged through their role in the prevention of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Consumers now expect fresh produce year-round and in the United States purchase grapes, cantaloupe, or lettuce grown in Central or South America within days of harvest.

Preventing the exposure of raw fruits and vegetables to microorganisms while in the field, orchard, or vineyard is impossible. Fruit and vegetables are produced in a natural environment and are therefore exposed to a wide range of microorganisms. The majority of microorganisms that are recovered from raw fruits and vegetables at harvest do not represent a human health risk but may cause spoilage. However, the number of outbreaks caused by foodborne pathogens associated with fresh produce has increased during the past three decades. Without further efforts to understand the complex interactions between microbes and fresh fruits and vegetables and the mechanisms by which contamination occurs from the farm to the fork, this trend will likely continue.

Consumers now demand fresh fruits and vegetables that may have been produced in remote areas of the world packaged for convenience and available at a reasonable price at the local supermarket. Produce must be of high quality microbiologically, or the product will spoil or potentially cause human illness. Knowledge of the microbiology of fresh fruits and vegetables...
preharvest and at all stages postharvest (i.e., processing, packaging, storage, and at retail outlets) is imperative to the development of new technologies and implementation of innovative methods to ensure that a wholesome, microbiologically safe product reaches the consumer.

This book provides the essential information on the microbiology of fresh produce. It focuses on the unique challenges to the control of microorganisms on produce from the farm to the consumer. The latest technologies for reducing microbial load, packaging, and detection are discussed. Consumer knowledge of produce handling, foodborne illness risks, and future product desires are covered. The association of human pathogens with outbreaks of foodborne illness and a perspective on the microbiological safety of produce are presented. This book will be of interest to microbiologists, food safety experts, extension specialists, food scientists, and specialists in academia, government, and industry concerned with the microbiological quality of fresh fruits and vegetables.

I am grateful to each of the subject experts who authored chapters of this book and to the many people who have made important contributions to it. Their promptness and cooperation made possible the timely completion of this book.

KARL R. MATTHEWS
Index

A
Acetic acid, as sanitizer, 98, 101–102, 179–180
Acid tolerance, of microbes, 136–138
Acidic electrolyzed water, as sanitizer, 100, 177, 186
Adaptation, microbial, to fresh-cut-produce operations, 132–139
Adhesins, in microbial attachment, 59–60, 62–64
Agrobacterium, attachment to plant surfaces, 59–62
Air-handling systems, microbial contamination of, 90–91
Alkaline sanitizers, 91–92
Ammonia, as sanitizer, 180
Anaerobic conditions, in modified-atmosphere packaging, 125
Antibrowning treatment, 130–131
Antimicrobial substances, see also Sanitizers and disinfectants naturally produced, 106–107
Ascorbic acid, as antibrowning agent, 130
Attachment, microbial, 56–64
to fresh-cut produce, 135–137
mechanisms of, 58–64
plant environment and, 56–57
to sprouts, 171
Azospirillum, attachment to plant surfaces, 61, 64

B
Bacteriocins, antimicrobial action of, 106, 177
Bacteriophages, for biocontrol, 145, 184–185
Bean sprouts, see Sprouts
Biocontrol agents, for fresh-cut produce, 145
Biodegradable coatings, 105–106
Biofilms on packinghouse surfaces, 40
sanitizer effects on, 93
on sprouts, 171
Bioluminescence methods, for contamination trace back, 148
Biosecurity, 45–47
Bird control, in packinghouses, 38–39
Browning, of fruits, treatments for, 130–131

C
Calcinated calcium, as sanitizer, 100, 176
Calcium hypochlorite, as sanitizer, 94–96, 176, 179, 185
Calcium salts, as antibrowning agents, 130
Campylobacter, outbreaks of, 123
Canada, irrigation water quality guidelines of, 32
Carvacrol, as sanitizer, 100–101
Cellulose fibrils, in microbial attachment, 61
Centers for Disease Control, food safety jurisdiction of, 149
Chitosan, as edible coating, 105–106
Chlorine dioxide, as sanitizer, 91, 96–97, 102, 141–142
Chlorine gas, as sanitizer, 94–96
for fresh-cut produce, 140–141
for sprouts, 176, 177–179
Chromogenic agar media, for contamination trace back, 149
Cinnamaldehyde, as sanitizer, 100
Coatings, edible, 105–106
Composting, of manure, 37
Consumer handling of produce, 221–231
education program for, 8, 22
future concerns, 228–229
perception of microbiological hazards and, 225
perception of safety and, 223–225
practices of, 225–226
selection of, 221–223, 226–228
Contamination
in food preparation, 227–228
in home storage, 226–227
prevention of, 4–5, see also Good agricultural practices (GAPs)
Crisis management plan, 46
Critical control points, in storage temperatures, 127
Crop protection, water quality for, 34–35
Cryptosporidium, 2
outbreaks of, 14–15
in sprouts, 201, 203
Cuticle, microbial attachment to, 56–57
Cyclospora cayetanensis
outbreaks of, 10–11, 14–15, 25–26
in sprouts, 201

D
Department of Agriculture
food safety jurisdiction of, 149–152
proactive safety measures of, 152–153
Disinfectants, see Sanitizers and disinfectants
Distribution, of produce, see Processing

E
Edible coatings, 105–106
Education, for good agricultural practices, 27–31
Electrolyzed oxidizing water, as sanitizer, 99–100
Employees, see Workers
Enterobacter agglomerans, attachment to plant surfaces, 63
Enterobacteriaceae, in sprouts, 169–170
Equipment harvest pathogens on, 6–7
sanitation for, 38
in packinghouse, 40
as pathogen source, 5–7
for sanitizing, 101–103
for washing, 101–102
Escherichia coli
adaptation of, in fresh-cut produce, 133, 135, 136, 139
infective dose of, 136–137
in manure, 4
pasteurization for, 102
Escherichia coli O157:H7, 101
acid resistance in, 21
adaptation of, in fresh-cut produce, 137
attachment of, 57–58
chlorine dioxide effects on, 142
in fresh-cut produce, 137, 140
hydrogen peroxide effects on, 143
internalization of, 69–72, 86, 88
in irrigation water, 3
localization in fruit, 67
localization in leaves, 65–66
localization in roots, 68
in manure, 3
novel antimicrobial treatments for, 99–101
outbreaks of, 5, 10–12, 123
persistence of, 73–74
postharvest treatments for novel, 99–101
sanitizers in, 92–99
technology for, 101–106
in sprouts, 167–168, 173–206
survival of, 73–74, 87
Ethylenediamine tetraacetic acid salts, antimicrobial activity of, 143

F
Feces
animal, see Manure
human, pathogens in, 23
Flagella, in microbial attachment, 64
Food and Drug Administration
food safety jurisdiction of, 149–152
Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, 24
produce pathogen survey of, 2
sprout guidelines of, 168
on storage temperatures, 126
Food preparation, see also Fresh-cut produce, preparation of carelessness in, 22
pathogen sources in, 7–8
Foodborne illnesses, see also specific pathogens
- economic impact of, 25–26
- food preparation and, 7–8
- in the immunocompromised, 22
- infective dose in, 136–138
- irrigation water quality and, 132
- outbreaks of, see Outbreaks
- from produce workers, 130
- unpasteurized juice and, 25

FoodNet, 150–151

Fresh-cut produce, 121–165
- antibrowning treatments for, 130–131
- contamination trace back in, 146–149
- freshness indicators for, 152
- health-conscious eating and, 121–123, 154
- information on, 154
- microbial attachment to, 107–108
- microbial contamination of, 138
- microbial growth in, 87–88
- pathogen control on, 139–149
- postharvest biocontrol for, 145
- preharvest biocontrol for, 145
- preparation of
  - clean conditions for, 129
  - microbial adaptation to, 132–139
  - microbial quality before, 128–129
  - personal hygiene during, 129–130
  - water quality in, 132
- proactive safety measures for, 152–153
- regulations on, 149–152
- respiration in, 125
- sales statistics for, 7, 122, 223
- sanitation importance with, 6–7
- sanitizers for, 93, 140–145
- in school lunch programs, 122
- spoilage of, 123–128
- temperature abuse of, 125–128
- unique characteristics of, 129
- as wounded plant tissue, 124–125

Freshness indicators, 152

Glutamate-dependent acid resistance system, 138–139

Good agricultural practices (GAPs), 5, 21–53, 149–150
- biosecurity plan in, 45–46
- choosing to implement, 25–27
- crisis management plan in, 46
- definition of, 22–23
- future of, 48–50
- introduction of, 24
- irrigation water quality and, 31–35
- manure use and, 35–37
- modification of, 48
- principles of, 24–25
- produce safety assurance pyramid based on, 26–27
- record keeping for, 44–45
- role of, 47–48
- sanitation practices in, 37–45
  - field, 37–38
  - packinghouse, 38–43
- soil type and, 35–37
- for specialty produce markets, 46–47
- for sprouts, 205
- training programs for, 27–31
- worker health and hygiene in, 29–31

Good manufacturing practices, for sprouts, 206

H

HACCP, see Hazard analysis critical control point plan

Hand washing, 30, 42, 227

Harvest, pathogen sources in, 5–6

Hazard analysis critical control point plan
- development of, 47–48
- for fresh-cut produce, 7–8, 139–140
- for juice, 25
- for sprouts, 206–207
- verification of, 153

Heat treatment, 102–103, 180–181, 183

Hepatitis A virus
- irradiation of, 103
- outbreaks of, 13–14

“Hurdle concept,” in contamination, 94

Hydrogen peroxide, as sanitizer, 93, 98–99, 102, 107, 142–143

Hygiene, worker, see Workers, hygiene practices for

I

Identification, product, 45

Immunocompromised persons, susceptibility
Immunocompromised persons, susceptibility (continued) to foodborne pathogens, 22
Imported produce, pathogen sources in, 8–9
Infective dose, 136–138
Insect control, in packinghouses, 38–39
Integrated pest management, 224–225
Internalization, microbial, 69–72
through damaged tissue, 70
through natural openings, 69–70
preharvest, 70–72
sanitizer failure in, 93–94
in sprouts, 171–172
Iodine-based sanitizers, 91
Irradiation, of produce, 103, 144, 182
Irrigation water
GAP recommendations for, 35
methods of applying, 32, 34–35, 86
pathogens in, 3, 14, 23, 132
for sprouts, 185–187, 190–191
supply versus demand of, 33

K
Klebsiella, attachment to plant surfaces, 63

L
Lactic acid bacteria
antimicrobial action of, 106
for sprout decontamination, 184
Lactic acid salts, antimicrobial activity of, 143
Leaves
microbial attachment to, 56–57
microbial localization in, 65–66
Lectins, in microbial attachment, 62
Lipopolysaccharides, in microbial attachment, 61–62
Listeria monocytogenes
adaptation of, in fresh-cut produce, 135, 136
attachment of, 58, 64
in biofilms, 93
chlorine dioxide effects on, 142
edible coatings effects on, 106
in fresh-cut produce, 8, 140
hydrogen peroxide effects on, 143
in imported produce, 9
irradiation of, 103, 144
localization in fruit, 67
localization in roots, 68
outbreaks of, 123, 128
sanitizers for, 91–92, 94–95, 97–100
in sprouts, 173–174, 182, 184, 186, 189, 198
Localization, microbial, 64–72
in fruits, 66–68
in leaves, 65–66
in roots, 68

M
Manure
application of, 36–37
composting of, 37
pathogens in, 3–4, 23, 36
Microbiological data program, 151–152
Modified-atmosphere packaging, 89, 104–105, 125, 139
Mutations, in adaptive response, 133, 139

N
Nisin, antimicrobial activity of, 106, 144
Norovirus, outbreaks of, 10, 13, 30

O
Organic produce
consumer perception of, 224
fresh-cut, biocontrols for, 145
manure use for, 36, 37
microbiological quality of, 4, 87
sprouts, 175–176, 186–187
Outbreaks, 9–15
Campylobacter, 123
from cantaloupe contamination, 129
consumer buying habits affected by, 225
contamination trace back in, 146–149
Cryptosporidium, 14–15
Cyclospora cayetanensis, 10–11, 14–15, 25–26
economic impact of, 25–26
Escherichia coli O157:H7, 5, 10–12, 123
from fresh-cut produce, 123–124, 128, 146–149
hepatitis A, 13–14
information gathering in, 150–151
Listeria monocytogenes, 123, 128
from melon contamination, 129
norovirus, 10, 13, 30
from organic produce, 87
parasitic infections, 123
Salmonella, 10–11, 13, 129
Shigella, 10, 12, 123, 129
from sprouts, 5, 167–168, 172–175
Vibrio, 123
worker health and hygiene practices and, 29–31
Oxygen, limitation of, in fresh-cut produce packages, 125
Ozone, as sanitizer, 97–98, 178, 183

Packinghouse, 38–43
   design and construction of, 39–40
   employee facilities in, 40–43
   equipment for, 40
   pest management in, 38–39
   water quality in, 43
Pasteurization, of produce, 102
Pathogens, see also specific pathogens
   sources of, 2–9
      on farm, 23–24
      food preparation, 7–8
      harvest, 5–6
      imported products, 8–9
      preharvest, 2–5
      processing, 6–7
      survival of, versus soil type, 36–37
      types of, 2
Perishability, see Spoilage
Peroxyacetic acid, as sanitizer, 98–99
Pest management
   integrated programs for, 224–225
   in packinghouses, 38–39
Pesticides
   consumer concerns about, 224
   water mixed with, 34–35
Petting zoos, pathogens in, 46–47
Phenolic compounds, as sanitizers, 91, 100–101
“Pick-your-own” markets, 46
Plant surfaces, colonization of, 56–57
Polymerase chain reaction, for contamination trace back, 146–148
Polyphenol oxidase inhibitors, as antibrowning agents, 130
Polysaccharides, in microbial attachment, 61–62
Postharvest handling and processing, 85–120, see also Fresh-cut produce
   equipment for, 101
   for fresh-cut produce, 145
   future developments in, 107–108
   microbiology of, 85–88
   novel antimicrobial treatments of, 99–101
   potential treatment strategies for, 106–107
   prior to packaging, 88–92
   procedures for, 101–106
   sanitation in, 90–92
   shelf life and, 88–90
   of sprouts, 185–187
   wash treatments in, 92–99
Potassium permanganate, as sanitizer, 100
Preharvest
   biocontrol during, 145
   pathogen sources in, 2–5
   Preparation, see Food preparation; Fresh-cut produce, preparation of
Pressure treatment, of sprouts, 182
Probiotics, for sprout decontamination, 183–185
Processing, pathogen sources in, 6–7
Produce safety assurance pyramid, 26–27
Pseudomonas
   attachment to plant surfaces, 63
   in biofilms, 93
   growth of, 87–88, 104–105
   in modified-atmosphere packaging, 104–105
   in sprouts, 169–170
PulseNet, 150–151

Q
“Qualified through Verification” program, 153
Quaternary ammonium compounds, as sanitizers, 91

R
Radiation treatment, of produce, 103, 144, 182, 186
Radio frequency treatment, 103
Rapid test kits, for microorganisms, in sprouts, 190–191
Recall, product, 45, 46
Record keeping, for GAP implementation, 44–45
Regulations, for fresh-cut produce safety, 149–152
Respiration, of wounded plant tissue, 125
Restaurants, produce-related outbreaks in, 11–12
Retail markets, microbiological quality in, 9
Reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction, for contamination trace back, 148
Rhizobium, attachment to plant surfaces, 58, 60, 61
Rhizoplane, microbial attachment to, 57
RNA polymerase, in adaptive response, 133
Rodent control, in packinghouses, 38–39

Roots
microbial attachment to, 57
microbial localization in, 68
rpoS gene mutations, in adaptation, 133, 135, 139

S
Salmonella
acid resistance of, 138
adaptation of, in fresh-cut produce, 133, 135–138
attachment to plant surfaces, 64
chlorine dioxide effects on, 142
in fresh-cut produce, 8, 140
hydrogen peroxide effects on, 143
in imported produce, 9
infective dose of, 136–137
internalization of, 70–72, 86
localization in fruit, 66–67
localization in leaves, 65
localization in roots, 68
in manure, 3, 4
outbreaks of, 10–11, 13, 129
pasteurization of, 102
inactivation of, 74
sanitizers for, 92–95, 97–98, 100
in sprouts, 167–168, 173–206
survival of, 74
Sanitation
field, 37–38
packinghouse, 38–43
Sanitizers and disinfectants
agents for, 91–92, 94–99
combinations of, 144–145
efficacy of, 92–94
for equipment, 90–91
equipment for, 101–102
for facilities, 90–91
for fresh-cut produce, 93, 140–145
future of, 107–108
importance of, 6
microbial attachment and, 135–136
microbial susceptibility to, 94
novel, 99–101
for packinghouse, 40, 43
for sprouts, 176–183
visual effects of, 88–89
School lunches, fruit and vegetable promo-
tion for, 122
Security, 45–47
Seed sprouts, see Sprouts
Shelf life, 88–90
at chilling temperatures, 127–128
heat treatment effects on, 102–103
modified-atmosphere packaging for, 89, 104–105, 125–127, 139
Shigella
adaptation of, in fresh-cut produce, 133, 136, 137
infective dose of, 136–137
outbreaks of, 10, 12, 123, 129
sanitizers for, 101
survival of, in modified-atmosphere packaging, 105
Shredders, microbes in, 90
Sigma factors, in adaptive response, 133, 135
Sodium hypochlorite, as sanitizer, 94–96, 107, 176, 185
Sorbic acid, antimicrobial activity of, 143–144
Specialty produce markets, 46–47
Spoilage
of fresh-cut produce, 123–128
freshness indicators for, 152
microbes causing, 4
microbial growth in, 89–90
prevention of, sanitizers for, 96
temperature conditions in, 125–128
Sprouts, 167–219
decontamination of, 175–187
biological interventions for, 183–185
chemical interventions for, 176–180, 182–183
physical interventions for, 180–183
postharvest, 185–187
during sprouting, 185–187
good agricultural practices for, 205
good manufacturing practices for, 206
hazard analysis and critical control point systems for, 206–207
native microbes on, 168–172
outbreaks related to, 5, 167–168, 172–175
pathogens in, 5
detection of, 187–202
reduction of, 204–207
types of, 172–175
sanitizers for, 176–183
seeds for, pathogens in, 202–204
Storage, of produce, at home, 226–227
Surfactant, with sanitizers, 96, 176
Survival, microbial, 72–74

T
Temperature conditions, for fresh-cut produce, 125–127, 152
Titanium dioxide, for air decontamination, 91
Toilet facilities, for workers, 30–31, 41
Training, for good agricultural practices, 27–31
Trisodium phosphate, as sanitizer, 100
Tsunami, as sanitizer, 99

U
Ultrasound, with chlorine compounds, as sanitizers, 99
UV light
for air decontamination, 90–91
as produce sanitizer, 103–104, 144

V
Vacuum infiltration, of sanitizers, 102
Vapor-phase sanitizing treatment, 101–102, 179–180
Vibrio, outbreaks of, 123
Vibrio cholerae, adaptation of, in fresh-cut produce, 137
Victory water, as sanitizer, 99
Viruses, sanitizers for, 96

W
Washing
equipment for, 101–102
in fresh-cut-produce operations, 132
in home kitchen, 228
novel treatments in, 99–101
pathogen sources in, 6–7
procedure for, 94–99
sanitizers for, see Sanitizers and disinfectants
Wastewater reuse, in agriculture, 32
Water
for crop protection, 34–35
in fresh-cut-produce operations, 132
irrigation, see Irrigation water
ozonated, 97–98
postharvest, 43
Workers
hygiene practices for, 5–6
in fresh-cut produce preparation, 129–130
importance of, 29–31
postharvest, 88
packinghouse, facilities for, 40–43
World Health Organization, irrigation water quality guidelines of, 32

X
Xanthomonas vesicatoria, attachment to plant surfaces, 63