Produce: Quality and Safety Go Together

Most people are aware that eating fruits and vegetables are important for a healthy, balanced diet. With more reports of people getting sick from eating produce contaminated with bacteria consumers wonder what they should do. You can get the benefits of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables by taking care when selecting and handling produce.

When shopping:

• First, check to be sure that the fresh fruits and vegetables you buy are not bruised or damaged. Bacteria can enter bruised or damaged produce more easily.

• Make sure fresh cut fruits and vegetables are kept refrigerated at the store and at home. Do not buy fresh cut items that are not refrigerated.

• Keep produce separate from raw meats, poultry or seafood when shopping, transporting and storing at home.

Preparing food:

• Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling fresh fruits and vegetables.

• Clean all surfaces and utensils that will touch fresh produce with hot water and soap. This includes cutting boards, counter tops, peelers and knives.

• Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under clean running tap water. Even produce with skins or rinds that are not eaten should be washed, by rubbing or scrubbing with a vegetable brush under running water. Do NOT use soap to wash fruits and vegetables.

• Check the label on packaged fruits and vegetables. If it says “ready-to-eat” or “open and serve”, no rinsing is necessary. If the label does not indicate it can be served from the package, rinse thoroughly with clean running water, gently rubbing surfaces. After rinsing produce, dry with a clean towel or use a salad spinner to remove excess water.
Use a separate cutting board for fresh produce, and raw meat, poultry and seafood. If fruits or vegetables that will not be cooked touches raw animal foods or juices, throw it out!

Clean cutting boards with hot water and soap before and after preparing fresh fruits and vegetables.

Remove and throw away bruised or damaged portions of fruits and vegetables.

Serving food and storing:

Refrigerate all cut, peeled or cooked fresh fruits and vegetables within two hours. Harmful bacteria can grow on produce left at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

If in doubt, throw it out!

Fruits and vegetables in all forms are part of a healthy lifestyle. Selecting quality produce and handling them properly, will enable you to be safe and continue to enjoy the variety of flavors and nutritional benefits of produce.