

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Walt Helmick, Commissioner



304-558-3708

www.agriculture.wv.gov



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NEWS RELEASE
June 24, 2016

Contact: Buddy Davidson
Communications Officer
304/558-3708; 304/541-5932 (cell)
bdavidson@wvda.us

Commissioner of Agriculture Warns Flooded Gardens May Be Contaminated

Charleston, W.Va. – West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick has issued a caution to West Virginia farmers and home gardeners in the wake of recent severe flooding in the Mountain State.

“We realize that many in our state are dealing with much more pressing issues than their gardens, but it’s important that people realize that produce that has been in contact with flood water is a potential health hazard,” said Commissioner Helmick.

Most human pathogenic bacteria such as *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella* die off after about 90 days, but some bacteria such as *Listeria campylobacter* can persist in soil for up to a year.

“If your plants come in contact with flood water, the safest thing to do is to not eat them. Dispose of them,” says John Bombardiere, West Virginia State University Extension Agent.

Bombardiere noted that flood waters might contain sewage, heavy metals or dangerous microorganisms.

“You just don’t know when it floods. All sorts of things can wash in,” he said.

The United State Food and Drug Administration’s Guide on Flooding says: “If the edible portion of a crop is exposed to flood waters, it is considered adulterated under ... the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and should not enter human food channels. There is no practical method of reconditioning the edible portion of a crop that will provide a reasonable assurance of human food safety. Therefore, the FDA recommends that these crops be disposed of in a manner that ensures they are kept separate from crops that have not been flood damaged to avoid adulterating ‘clean’ crops.”

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