

AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER WARNS OF FLOOD CONTAMINATION TO FIELDS AND GARDENS

Charleston, W.Va. -- West Virginia has once again been inundated with flood waters over the past two weeks. Agriculture Commissioner Walt Helmick says state growers need to consider the condition of their fields and act appropriately when it comes to harvesting their crops.

"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, the West Virginia Extension Agent at West Virginia State University specializing in vegetables.

For example, lettuce, a tomato that's ready to pick, or potatoes that are underground and come in direct contact with flood water should not be consumed by humans or animals.

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 section 402(a)(4) (21 U.S.C. 342(a)(4)) of 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 (Ref. 1, 2, 3)."*

"If for some reason there was sewage in the water, there could be e-coli, heavy metals, or other pathogenic organisms," stresses Bombardiere. "You just don't know when it floods. All sorts of things can wash in." If your field or garden is flooded but the water does not come in direct contact with the produce, the FDA advises you to use your own judgement on whether to sell and consume the food.

For more information, log on to:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/EmergencyResponse/ucm287808.htm>.

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