



**Cornell University**  
**Cooperative Extension**  
**Schoharie County**

173 South Grand Street  
Cobleskill, New York 12043  
t. 518.234.4303  
t. 518.296.8310  
f. 518.234.4305

**For Immediate Release**  
**Contact David Cox, Ag Program Leader (518) 234-4303 or 296-8310**

**Flooded Vegetables – Do Not Consume!**

Cornell University Cooperative Extension Schoharie County Educators, Chuck Bornt, Laura McDermott and Crystal Stewart, from the Capital District Vegetable and Small Fruit Program offer the following recommendations concerning flooded vegetables from the FDA.

**According to the Food and Drug Administration, foods exposed to flood waters are considered “adulterated” and should not enter the human food supply. In addition, crops and other food commodities exposed to flood waters would not be acceptable for use in animal feed.** Food safety is now our major concern.

What does this mean? It means that any of your crops in which the edible portion was covered with flood water cannot be sold for human consumption, **especially** those fields that were flooded with river or stream water since there is no way to assess the microbial and chemical contaminants that may be present. We are telling you this for your own protection. **No one wants to be responsible for causing a food borne illness.** A food borne illness event could result in further loss of life, the shutting down of farmers markets and possibly the loss of your property and other assets.

The food safety concerns include not only microbial contamination (*E.coli*, *Salmonella* etc.) but also other contaminants such as petroleum products, pesticides, heavy metals, raw sewage etc. Those fields flooded by rivers and streams are at a higher risk of both microbial and chemical contamination because it is hard to determine what might have entered the river upstream of you. For example, if there is an animal operation a couple miles upstream, there is a very good chance that runoff from barns containing manures have contaminated the water and moved downstream and onto your vegetable fields. It is also likely that sewage treatment plants and even home septic systems were overcome by flood waters and spilled into streams and rivers. Or, a manufacturing plant upstream could have flooded moving chemicals from a processing operation into the water. Additionally, crops that have been under water for an extended period of time are of poorer quality and are more likely to spoil in storage.

**Bottom line: Fresh fruits and vegetables that have been inundated by flood waters cannot be adequately cleaned and should be destroyed.**

*Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities*

**Crops in which you harvest the edible part that has been underwater and eat raw such as greens, tomatoes, peppers, beans, eggplant, melons and small fruits as well (raspberries, strawberries, blueberries etc.) should not be harvested and sold at all. The risk of contamination is too great.** Even though there is less risk to crops that are eaten cooked such as winter squash and potatoes, the risk in our opinion is still too high. More information on this can be found below. Cooking food thoroughly may kill food borne pathogens, but it will do nothing for other contaminants such as petroleum, heavy metals, etc. There is very little research in regards to these issues with flooded crops, though there is some data to suggest some crops such as carrots are more likely to absorb chemicals from the soil, which is why the recommendation errs on the side of caution. . We are urging you to make the best decision with the information at hand. When in doubt, do not harvest or sell the product. You could jeopardize your own financial welfare and that of the entire industry.

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities.

Laura McDermott  
Regional Agricultural Specialist  
Capital District Vegetable and Small Fruit Program  
Cornell University Cooperative Extension

*Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities*

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. NYS College and Life Sciences, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension associations, county governing bodies, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.