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FOOD SAFETY

Cornell Cooperative Extension Schoharie County offers the following information regarding food safety following the flooding resulting from Hurricane Irene.

Contaminated Foods

Contaminated foods may be a problem after any storm with flooding. Floodwaters may carry silt, raw sewage, oil, or chemical wastes. Filth and bacteria in floodwater contaminates food, making it unsafe to eat. Thoroughly inspect any food left in the house after a flood. Floodwater may have covered it, dripped on it, or seeped into it. If you are in doubt about the safety of a food, throw it out rather than risk disease. Use the following guidelines when deciding which foods to discard and which to save.

Food to Discard

Do not try to save any of these foods:

- Opened containers and packages that have come in contact with flood waters.
- Unopened jars and bottles with paper waxy seals such as those containing mayonnaise or salad dressing.
- Containers of spices, seasonings, and flavorings.
- Flour, grains, sugars, and coffee in canisters or bags.
- Paper, cloth, fiber, or cardboard boxes, even if the contents seem dry. This includes salt, cereals, pasta products, rice, and any "sealed" packages of crackers, cookies, or mixes within a larger paper box.
- Dented seams, bulging, rusty or leaking tin cans, or cans that have been tossed about and are found far from their normal storage spot. Seams on these cans may have been weakened, or their seals may have broken, causing contamination or spoilage.
- Jam or jelly sealed with paraffin.
- Containers with non-sealed, fitted lids, such as cocoa or baking powder.
- Commercially-bottled carbonated beverages. If the cap is crusted with silt, don't attempt to wash, since pressure in bottles may cause an explosion.
- Foil or cellophane packages.
- All fresh vegetables and fruits that have been in contact with floodwaters.
- Fresh meat, fish, and poultry that has been in contact with floodwaters.

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

- Home-canned foods, even if the jar seems tightly sealed. In some cases, tightly sealed home-canned foods may be safe, depending on the conditions. If your supply of canned food is extensive, contact the CCE office for information.

Other Packaged Foods

Carefully examine sealed metal drums, metal-linked casks, or cases and wooden barrels such as those used for liquids. If you find leaks, put aside for health teams to check. Destroy containers that cannot be put where no one will use the foods until they are checked; they may be dangerous. Examine sealed foil or cellophane containers carefully for leaks or breaks and discard any damaged containers. If the food in these containers is normally finely divided (powdered or granulated) but is now caked or not free-flowing, discard. Discard sound foil packages that show stain on the inner paper wrapper. Unbroken packages with evidence of outer water contamination may be wiped dry and used.

Food to Keep

The following foods are safe if you wash and sanitize containers before use.

- Undamaged tin cans. Be sure to wash and sanitize the outside of the container before opening the can. For added safety, boil food before using.

Disinfecting Cans and Commercial Glass Jars

All cans and commercial glass jars free of rust or dents must be washed and sanitized before they are opened.

1. Inspect cans and destroy any that bulge or leak (indications of spoilage).
2. Remove labels and wash in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush. Remove all silt.
3. Immerse scrubbed containers for 15 minutes in cold (60 to 70 °F) chlorine solution. Household bleaches contain from 2 percent to 6 percent chlorine. The amount of bleach to add to water depends on the percent chlorine it contains. Contact the CCE office for more information or go to our website at <http://cceschoharie.org>.
4. Remove containers from solution, rinse in clean water, and air dry before opening. Relabel if possible. Use as soon as possible as containers may rust. Store containers where they will not be contaminated again.

Other ways to disinfect cans and commercial glass jars include:

1. Immerse in some other sterilizing solution recommended by local authorities. Rinse in clean water.
2. Place containers in boiling water and boil vigorously for at least 10 minutes. Dry cans to prevent rusting. Relabel cans.

Note: Chlorine and most other sterilizing solutions are poisonous. Be careful so family members, pets, and livestock cannot swallow it.

Flooded Garden Produce

Discard all fruits and vegetables that have come into contact with flood waters.

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