

Food Code Fact Sheet #14

What you should know about the Code

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Sprouting Seeds or Beans

OAR 333-150-0000, CHAPTER 3-502.11

A food establishment shall obtain a variance from the regulatory authority as specified in § 8-103.10 and under § 8-103.11 before: ^{Pf}

(H) Sprouting seeds or beans. ^{Pf}

PUBLIC HEALTH REASONS:

Since 1995, raw seed sprouts have emerged as a recognized source of foodborne illness in the United States. The FDA and CDC have issued health advisories that persons who are at a greater risk for foodborne disease should avoid eating raw alfalfa sprouts until such time as intervention methods are in place to improve the safety of these products.

Because no single treatment has been found to completely eliminate pathogens, FDA recommends microbial testing of spent irrigation water. Verification testing can be done on-site in the retail establishment if adequate equipment and qualified personnel are available or private laboratories can be contracted to perform the necessary tests. A seed disinfection treatment done in conjunction with microbial testing reduces the likelihood that contaminated product will be sold. Testing should be done for both the pathogens of concern, *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella*.

Fresh produce is an important addition to a healthy diet. However, some produce, including sprouts, have been implicated in foodborne illness. Raw and lightly cooked sprouts, especially alfalfa, clover and mung bean sprouts, have been associated with foodborne illness in a number of outbreaks. Microorganisms already on the seeds or introduced during the sprouting process grow quickly during the ideal conditions of germination and sprouting. Because of this, it is now required to have a variance and a HACCP plan to sprout seeds or beans in a restaurant environment.

Sprouts are defined as the germinating form of seeds and beans. Examples of sprouts include:

- Alfalfa
- Clover
- Sunflower
- Broccoli
- Mustard
- Radish
- Garlic
- Dill
- Mung
- Kidney/pinto/navy beans
- Soy beans
- Wheat berries (wheat grass)

There is no single treatment so far that has been shown to completely eliminate pathogens on seeds or sprouts that cause foodborne illness without affecting germination or yield. Therefore,

every precautionary measure should be taken to prevent high levels of bacteria from growing on the seeds or sprouts. Using the following retail sprout industry "Best Practices" will help ensure a safe and healthy product. These best practices are available online at: <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/draft-guidance-industry-standards-growing-harvesting-packing-and-holding-sprouts-human-consumption>



Mung bean sprouts and alfalfa sprouts are commonly used in restaurants.

Further information is available at the FDA website, <http://www.fda.gov>, by entering "sprouts" in the search window or on the OHA webpage at: www.healthoregon.org/foodsafety.