

Quick Facts: **Water Quality**

Irrigation in Alberta

- The use of non-treated irrigation water is a common practice to grow produce in Alberta and elsewhere in the world.
- Most (about 90%) of the irrigated crops grown in Alberta are processed, and not consumed raw.
- The commercial production and processing chain includes many safety practices that minimize the risk of water borne pathogens to human health.
- There have been no reported incidences of foodborne illnesses linked to irrigation water used to grow produce in Alberta.
- Everyone should follow these precautionary rules of thumb:
 - Do not drink untreated water
 - Thoroughly wash raw produce with potable water before eating

Irrigation Water Quality

- Irrigation Districts and producers take this seriously.
- Since 2006, Alberta's irrigation industry has been and continues to monitor and address irrigation water quality.
- Quality of that water is generally excellent – some of the best in the world owing to its source water from snowmelt in the Rocky Mountains.
- Irrigation canals are designed to keep runoff water from entering the irrigation system.
- Canals are continually being replaced with buried pipelines thereby reducing contamination pathways.

Pathogens in Water

- Fecal pathogens are likely present in all non-treated surface water, including irrigation water.
- The presence of pathogens in irrigation water does not necessarily mean there is increased risk of foodborne illness. This will depend on many factors including whether the pathogen can actually survive on the produce in sufficient numbers to cause disease.
- Risk is reduced by implementing practices that prevent manure contamination of water and food processing.
- Composting or drying manure prior to land application reduces the risk of transferring pathogens directly onto produce.



For more information on irrigation water quality safety for fresh field-grown fruits and vegetables, google "ropin' the web irrigation water quality safety". AIDA gratefully acknowledges Alberta Agriculture and Forestry's contribution of information for this publication.

More information on the Economic Value of Irrigation can be found at www.aipa.ca