USE REUSABLES

Best Practices for Small-Scale Distribution

Cleaning Reusable Plastic Containers

Like any food-contact surface, Reusable Plastic Containers (RPCs) must be cleaned and sanitized as frequently as necessary to ensure sanitary conditions. RPCs are best cleaned using commercial sanitation equipment; however, small-scale distributors lacking such equipment can instead follow the steps outlined below.

NOTE: The best practices described in this guide can be part of, but don't replace, a safe food system that is in compliance with government regulations.

5-Step Cleaning Process

Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves and eyewear during the cleaning process to prevent skin contact with wash solution and sanitizer.

1. **Pre-wash**
   Use clean water to remove visible dirt and debris that can lead to contamination.

2. **Wash**
   Scrub all surfaces with soap and water.

3. **Rinse**
   Thoroughly rinse off soap and residue that can harbor bacteria in the sanitation process.

4. **Sanitize**
   See table at right for commonly used sanitizers. Methods: **Submerge** RPCs in a tub full of sanitizer solution, **apply** solution with a spray bottle, or **wipe** containers with a clean towel soaked in sanitizer solution.

5. **Dry**
   Air-dry containers completely before use.

Commonly Used Sanitizers

Chemical Sanitizer*	Concentration/ Contact Time
Chlorine	100-200 ppm in water; contact time at least 1 minute
Iodine	Follow manufacturer's directions; contact time at least 1 minute
Quaternary Ammonium Compounds	Follow manufacturer's directions; contact time at least 1 minute
Peracetic Acid (PAA)**	100-200 ppm in water; contact time at least 1 minute

* Organic certified operations: check with your certifier for a list of approved sanitizers.
** Most environmentally friendly option

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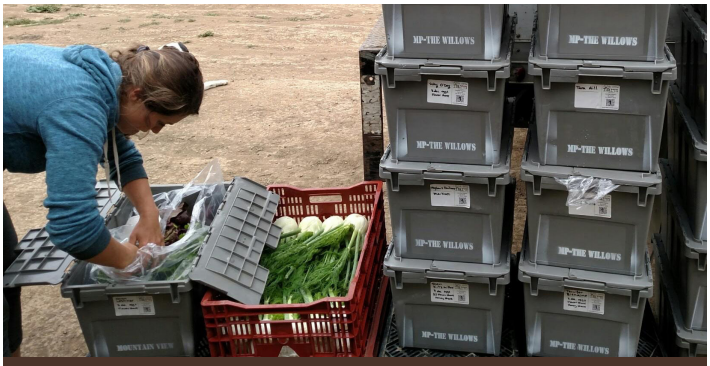

A growing number of small farms are switching from cardboard boxes to RPCs for fresh produce distribution. Best practices for safe food handling are critical throughout the production and distribution process.

Fifth Crow Farm Pescadero, California
Full Belly Farm Guinda, California
Fiddlehead Farm Corbett, Oregon

Safe Food Handling Best Practices

Properly cleaning Reusable Plastic Containers (RPCs) is an important step toward a safe food system, but there are other potential sources of contamination, such as equipment, pests, packing sheds, delivery vehicles, and human contact. It is the RPC user's responsibility to ensure that a safe food system in compliance with government regulations is in place; see "Resources" below.

"Cleaning our RPCs is a pretty quick step and just part of our routine. We much prefer it over using liners that are costly and generate waste."

Judith Redmond, Full Belly Farm

Resources

Listed below are resources to provide additional guidance on cleaning and sanitation best practices. A more comprehensive list can be found at www.UseReusables.org/best-practices.

General Food Safety Guidance

University of California Small Farm Program
Food safety resources for small farms

Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)
Current law establishing food safety standards

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF)
Programs and resources to help small farmers comply with the FSMA

Sanitation Guidance

Cleaning and Sanitization of Food-contact Surfaces in Retail/Foodservice Establishments
Article published in Food Safety Magazine (2010)

Effective Cleaning and Sanitizing Procedures
JIFSAN Good Aquacultural Practices Program

Allowed Detergents and Sanitizers for Food Contact Surfaces and Equipment in Organic Operations (USDA)

Use Reusables is a program of Alameda County public agency StopWaste, aimed at helping businesses and institutions replace limited-use transport packaging materials like cardboard boxes and plastic stretch film with durable, reusable alternatives. Use Reusables offers grant funding, vendor referrals, and one-on-one technical assistance. For more information including case studies visit www.UseReusables.org.

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