



Dear Produce Supplier:

Albertsons has repeatedly expressed commitment to food safety related issues and has asked our fresh produce suppliers to do the same. We have requested that each of our business partners demonstrate a commitment to food safety by addressing five specific aspects of produce food safety:

- Safe Food Operating Manuals
- Self Audits
- Implementation of Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs)
- Third Party Audits (TPAs)
- Posting of Third Party Audits

It has been, and still is, Albertsons intent to encourage commitment to these aspects of food safety. We believe they will result in a safer food supply and will enhance the image of the fresh produce industry as a whole.

We intend to partner with and reward suppliers that have shown commitment to the efforts noted above. Many suppliers have already shared information with us, which demonstrates progress in regards to food safety efforts. Recognition has been given to these suppliers, through our buying staff, according to the level of commitment as measured by the following criteria:

Levels of Commitment:

1. Company expresses commitment to accepted food safety practices as described in FDA Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables.
2. Manuals are created for each of your operations to document process controls and identify other factors that impact safe food handling.
3. Self-audits are established and conducted for each of your operations.
4. Arrangements are made for a TPA to verify compliance with GAP's as outlined in the FDA Guide.
5. Third Party verification audits are conducted for your operations.
6. Results of Third Party audits are posted for Albertsons private review or otherwise available for Albertsons review.

Albertsons is offering this letter as a clarification of our expectations and is asking **Your Company** to respond to us with a commitment that acknowledges and supports safe food handling practices. Please refer to the FDA Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables found at www.foodsafety.gov/~dms/prodguid.html for commonly accepted Good Agricultural Practices in the fields and in packing and cooling operations. We would also refer you to www.PrimusLabs.com <<http://www.PrimusLabs.com>> for customized manual development and self-auditing programs that are available at no cost. We have approved several third party auditors that can provide professional guidance and an assurance that your operations are in conformity with commonly accepted practices.

Additional resources and assistance are available through the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association (UFFVA). UFFVA, <http://www.uffva.org>, can be contacted through Donna Garren, Ph.D., Vice President Technical Affairs, UFFVA, 1901 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20006, (202) 303-3400 ext. 403.

Albertsons is committed to offering the safest produce to our customers, and wishes to recognize our suppliers who are also committed to this effort. Therefore, we are asking you to provide us with a description of the progress you have made to date towards the Six Levels of Commitment steps that are reflected in this letter. Please refer to the following questionnaire answering each item, adding any comments that you would like to include and returning it for our review. After reviewing the completed questionnaires, we will assign levels of recognition to each responding company in accordance with our interpretation of the information provided. In some cases, we may wish to have follow-up visits, so we appreciate your providing a contact name and phone number for that purpose. We look forward to hearing from you, and appreciate your collaboration on this important topic.

Sincerely,

Albertsons

Michael Roberson
Corporate Manager of Quality Assurance and Food Safety

Dan Sutton
Corporate Director of DC Produce Procurement

Albertsons Produce Food Safety Questionnaire

Please provide us with a description of the progress you have made to date. You may continue your answers on additional pages if necessary. Examples of specifics we are looking for include:

1. A commitment to adhere to accepted food safety practices as described in *the FDA Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (www.foodsafety.gov/~dms/prodguid.html).

2. Food Safety manuals have been created for each of the operations that you are affiliated with (individual ranches, cooler operations, packing sheds, etc.) to document process controls and identify other factors that impact safe food handling? (See the primuslabs.com website for examples and templates).

3. Self-auditing criteria that have been established and actual audits conducted for each of the operations that you are affiliated with (individual ranches, cooler operations, packing sheds, harvest crews).

4. Arrangements that have been made for a third party auditor to verify compliance with good agricultural practices as outlined in the *FDA Guide to Minimize microbial Food safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (<http://www.foodsafety.gov/~dms/prodguid.html>).

5. Third party verification audits that have been conducted on operations that you are affiliated with?

6. Results of Third Party Audits made available to Albertsons.

Any comments, questions or suggestions you may have regarding Albertsons Produce Food Safety expectations are welcome and may be included here:

Company Name: _____ Contact Name: _____

Date: _____ Position: _____

Company Overview

General information	
Address	
Address (line 2)	
City	
State	
Zip Code	
Country	
Phone Number	
Fax Number	
Email	
Web Address	
Contact Individual	
Title	
Products	

Additional Questions

1. Are products produced from any contract farms? YES NO

2. If YES, are will willing to share this information with the grower? YES NO
 If Yes, please indicate the firms:

3. Do other companies co-pack for your brands? YES NO
 If Yes, please indicate the firms:

NOTE: An annual update of your food safety programs must be received by November 1 every year.

When complete, mail or fax this form along with Questionnaire to:

Michael Roberson
 Corporate Manager, Quality Assurance and Food Safety
 Albertsons, Inc.
 P.O. Box 20
 Boise, ID 83726
 Fax: (208) 395-6773
 Email: michael.roberson@albertsons.com



**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING
THE ALBERTSON'S LETTER TO THE PRODUCE SUPPLIER COMMUNITY:**

1. Q: What is Albertson's expecting of the suppliers? We need more specifics.

A: i) Develop safe production manuals

Each supplier should have manuals outlining procedures that address good agricultural practices (GAPs), and in the case of processors, good manufacturing practices (GMPs). A thorough understanding of any food operation is imperative in the control of food safety hazards. Each step in the course of producing, processing and transporting of foods should be analyzed to determine the potential for introduction of food safety hazards. Control points must be identified and documented, and science based procedures established so that the operation can be satisfactorily monitored and controlled. The concept of Hazard Analysis, Critical Control Points (HACCP) is a well recognized means of conducting food safety related functions. HACCP based plans are an example of the kind of documentation that would go in to an operational manual. Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOPs), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), and GAPs are other examples of documentation that should be included and utilized in the writing of safe production manuals. We consider the FDA's publication: Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables an excellent starting point. A copy of that guide can be found at <http://www.foodsafety.gov/~dms/prodguid.html>. One resource for developing the safe production manuals that we have confidence in is PrimusLabs.com of Santa Maria, CA <http://www.primuslabs.com/dd/index.html>. They have developed a set of Internet based programs that provide a step-by-step way to develop safe production manuals tailored to each operator's specific needs at no cost.

ii) Conduct self-audits using criteria described in the safe production manuals

Once a safe production manual has been created as described above, self-audits must be conducted in order to verify that the programs referenced in the food safety plan are working effectively. One example of the self-audit process can be found at the web site of PrimusLabs.com (www.primuslabs.com). This is an internally designed and controlled listing of criteria included in the safe production manuals, GAPs and GMPs that should be used by managers to assure compliance with critical elements of safe food handling is measured and documented. Self-audits are an important part of demonstrating safe handling practices, so they should be available to 3rd party auditors upon request. There is no requirement, however, to post results of self-audits on a website.

iii) Have an independent third party audit verify compliance with GAPs & GMPs

Several third party auditors have been evaluated and are recognized by Albertson's. Any of these parties will offer an independent verification of compliance with GAPs. In the

case of processors, compliance with GMPs would apply. A listing of these auditors follows below. The primary criteria for consideration in these audits are found in the FDA's "Guidance for Industry— Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables." Good knowledge of those guidelines, and diligent compliance with the principles addressed in that document will ensure success. Summary results of these 3rd party audits must be made available for our review.

2. Q: How does Albertson's measure the produce supplier's compliance with food safety expectations?

A: Albertson's has identified six progressive steps in regards to maximizing the safe handling of produce. Those six steps are:

- 1) A company expresses commitment to accepted food safety practices and described in *FDA Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*.
- 2) Manuals are created for each of your operations to document process controls and identify other factors that impact safe food handling.
- 3) Self-audits are established and conducted for each of your operations.
- 4) Arrangements are made with a Third Party Auditor, who is recognized by Albertson's, for verifying conformity to GAP's as outlined in the FDA Guide.
- 5) Third Party verification audits are conducted for your operations and affiliated operations.
- 6) Results of Third Party audits (or associated certifications) are made available for Albertson's review.

Based on information received, each produce supplier will be placed onto our list of suppliers who have demonstrated progress in this evolutionary process. We will interpret the information received to place each supplier at step [1-6]. We understand that this is a dynamic and continually evolving kind of effort, and welcome updates in regards to safe food handling practices so that each produce supplier will receive appropriate recognition.

3. Q: What is the scope of third party audits that the supplier is responsible for?

A: The supplier is responsible for third party audits of any facility, ranch, harvest crew that they own or manage. In addition, they are responsible to see that any of their suppliers also have been included in a third party audit. Even if the product passes through multiple layers of suppliers, each is expected to receive product only from entities that have complied with the requirements outlined above, and third party audit reports should be available for each subvendor during the 3rd Party Audit of a supplier.

4. Q: How do you address products from imported countries?

A: Suppliers and growers of foreign products will be held to the same standards as domestic sources. In many cases, foreign sources have already been under vigorous review from domestic customers, U.S. regulators, and foreign customers. Europe, Japan, and others have already established high standards. Credible field audit representatives are fairly common in many of the countries we import produce from.

5. Q: Is there a deadline for total compliance?

A: While earlier correspondence was intended to introduce our expectations, we appreciate the fact that the impact on a very significant and complex supplier base is huge and even international in scope. We are now working with various industry representatives to define and refine the specifics of those requirements, including timing for various stages of compliance. We do expect continuous progress to have been made towards meeting these objectives. The process is evolutionary, and Albertson's continues to assess the value of our suppliers, using criteria such as the ability to service our account with product that is safe, wholesome and of consistently high quality.

6. Q: Is there really going to be follow-through from Albertson's, or will this be an effort that fades?

A: Food safety issues are not fading. Many growers, processors and suppliers in the industry have been making commitments to these kinds of efforts for years, and in fact are pleased to have any support in encouraging higher industry standards. Albertson's does intend to be diligent in our pursuit of safe foods for our customers and to protect the reputation of the produce industry.

7. Q: The produce industry has multiple retail customers coming to us, each one with different specific requirements. We need to have one standard that responds to all of our customers, not different programs for each.

A: Safe food processing and agricultural practices are not established by Albertson's. Credible professionals in the field of Food Safety using guidelines established by the FDA help to establish the criteria for approval by Albertson's. We have met with produce industry organizations such as the United Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Association, various Federal and State Agricultural entities, and several independent third party auditors. With their input, we are taking the steps that we feel are appropriate to provide a list of auditors who can verify compliance with Good Agricultural Practices in a way that is universally accepted by Albertson's and many other buyers. This list is included in this document with the understanding that this is an evolving area. Changes resulting in a more standardized program are expected.

While it would be desirable to have all retailers accept the same criteria for third party approvals, we are prohibited by law from communicating with our competition and agreeing on vendor qualification and business allocation programs in advance. We are counting on trade associations to play a communications role in the standardization of these programs throughout the industry. We want to participate in this effort.

8. Q: Do vendors need to post the audit information on a web site?

A: Posting on a web site is only one means of sharing information with Albertson's. Hard copies of certifications provided by approved third party auditors may also be submitted for Albertson's review and consideration.

9. Q: What is supposed to be submitted to Albertson's?

A: The name of facility or operation being audited, the name of the third party auditor, the date of the audit and the audit results.

10. Q: What third parties are authorized as auditors?

A: Organizations recognized by Albertson's as credible technical resources and third party auditors include the following:

PrimusLabs.com

Contact: Brian Mansfield
2810 Industrial Parkway
Santa Maria, CA 93455
(805) 922-0055
Email: Brian@primuslabs.com

Davis Fresh Technologies

Contact: Devon Zagory
129 C Street, Suite #4
Davis, CA 95616
(530) 756-2720
Email: dzagory@davisfreshtech.com

Scientific Certification Systems (SCS)

Contact: Wilfred Sumner
Certification Programs
2000 Powell St., Suite 1350
Emeryville, CA 94608
(510) 452-8019
Email: wsumner@scscertified.com
Email: lovando@scscertified.com

AIB International

Contact: Judi Lazaro
PO Box 3999
Manhattan, KS 66505-3999
(800) 633-5137

USDA Federal-State Audit Program

Contact: Leanne L. Skelton
Chief USDA Fresh Products Branch Fruit &
Vegetable Programs
1400 Independence Ave., S.W. Room 2058-S
Washington, D.C., 20250-0240
Phone (202) 720-2482 toll free (800) 811-2373
Email Leanne.Skelton@usda.gov

NFPA – SAFE

Contact: Christy Jones
1350 I Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 639-5908
Email: CJones@nfpa-food.org

NSF Cook & Thurber

Contact: Helen Gipple
789 Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105
(866) 299-5695
Email: Gipple@nsf.org

Silliker Laboratories

Contact: Bethany Payne
900 Maple Road
Homewood, IL 60430
(708) 957-7878
Email: bethany.payne@silliker.com

ABC Research Corporation

Contact: Troy Ayers
3437 SW 24th Ave
Gainesville, FL 32607
(352) 372-0436

A•A•C Consulting Group

Contact: Edward Steele
7361 Calhoun Place Suite 500
Rockville, Maryland 20855-2765
(301) 838-3120

Pharmaceutical & Food Specialists (PhF)

Contact: Peter Cocotas
PO Box 7697
San Jose, CA 95150
(408)275-0161

This list will be updated from time to time as new third party auditors are approved by Albertson's.

11. Q: I do not want our company's audit results posted where others can have access to them.

A: This information is not available to unauthorized users. Some companies have elected to post information that is viewable by the public. Such posting has not been done at the request of Albertson's. It is also okay to send information to Albertson's directly to the attention of Michael Roberson, P.O. Box 20, Boise, ID 83726.

12. Q: Who is going to bear the expense of these audits, postings, and other program costs?

A: We expect the expense of safe food handling to be a part of the cost of being in the business.

13. Q: Our products are not vulnerable to the same foodborne illness risks as other industries are. How can we be held to the same standards?

A: While it is true that some products are associated with more risks than others, food safety professionals recognize the different standards and the differences will be taken into consideration in third party audits. Virtually no foods are risk free, however, and some type of food safety program is necessary for all products.

14. Q: Why are you paying so much attention to produce food safety issues when they account for such a small number of reported food borne illness cases? Shouldn't you be concentrating your efforts on retail handling, preparation and customer education?

A: We are concentrating on these other areas also. We have already implemented internal training and certification programs for our food handling department managers, store directors, and executives. Since 1994 we have trained and certified over 27,000 Certified Professional Food Managers. Every quarter we produce and give training updates to over 90,000 food handling associates at our supervision offices, stores and distribution centers. In 2000 we held 93 Food Safety Education Days at our stores, and we plan to hold even more in 2001. Food Safety Education Days are safe food handling principles presented to our customers by invited health department representatives. We are also a major sponsor of the "Fight BAC!" consumer education campaign. We are arranging to present "Fight BAC!" curriculum kits to thousands of schools throughout our marketing areas to assist in the education of school children in food safety in the home.