

Lavender Food Safety

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Lavender growers focus most of their efforts on decorative and value-added products. Culinary lavender is often a small part of a lavender operation. When it comes to product safety, all products carry some risks, such as allergens or contaminants, but culinary products often pose the greatest risk.

Food Safety Laws

While there are no laws requiring a grower to be certified through a food safety program, there is a legal requirement to ensure the product is safe. As a culinary herb, lavender's food safety requirements are listed in Ontario Regulation 119/11 of the Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001 (<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110119>). Culinary herbs are listed within the definition of "produce", and under Section II of the regulation (see the original for the full wording and legal definitions), no person shall harvest, sell, pack, or transport any produce for human consumption that is contaminated.

The term "contaminated" means that the food contains a substance not permitted or in excess of the regulations under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999*, the *Food and Drugs Act (Canada)* and the *Pest Control Products Act (Canada)*, or contains or has been exposed to a hazard, which is anything that would make the produce unfit for human consumption (e.g., pathogens that can cause a food-borne illness).

The regulation also includes specific requirements for packaging and labelling. Refer to the regulations for full details (pay particular attention to Section 20 – Labels on Produce).

What Does this Mean?

Lavender growers must follow best practices for handling produce, even if they are not certified through a food safety program. This means having a set of procedures that ensure the risk of contamination is minimized AND being able to prove it in the event a food safety issue occurs with your product. Some considerations include (but are not limited to):

- Ensure other plant species (e.g., weeds) are not mixed in with the lavender during harvest or during processing
- Ensure flower bundles are dried in an area free of birds, rodents or other potential sources of pathogens.

- Ensure all surfaces and tools used during and after harvest and during processing are made of materials that can be easily sanitized (e.g., stainless steel, plastic, glass), and they are cleaned and sanitized regularly.
- Ensure the finished product is stored in containers that prevent contamination between processing and final sale.
- Ensure all workers follow good practices for hygiene, including frequent hand washing, especially before and after each product batch.
- Ensure proper labelling so the customer is clear on what is consumable and what is not. Are your dried bundles and sachet buds safe for human consumption? If not, ensure the label is clear on the intended purpose.

Traceability is also an important part of a food safety program. This involves tracking product batches with unique codes and having documentation on the origins and destinations of each batch, so if a safety issue occurs, the issue can be traced back to its source, and only that batch is recalled rather than everything you produced that year.

Food Safety Programs

To meet the food safety requirements, it is always best to be trained or certified through a recognized food safety program. Lavender growers often use the Good Agriculture and Collection Practices (GACP) program offered by the Canadian Herb, Spice and Specialty Agriculture Association. The Ontario Lavender Association usually arranges training every couple of years. Let the association know if you are interested in a new course being offered. Other programs, such as CanadaGAP, are often used by produce growers selling to the major grocery chains.