

## How Can I Do a Cut Fruit/Melon Program Safely?

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Since I have been working in retail, I can't tell you how many times I have been asked this question. It makes sense though - especially in an industry with low margins and an opportunity to place value-added product out for sale. However, as the risks of produce processing have shown, it is increasingly difficult to control the possible presence of pathogens and their spread. Additionally, many produce department back rooms are rarely constructed in a sanitary manner or have the space needed to safely process products. All of this could add up to a recipe for disaster.

Firstly, talk with your produce supplier/distributor for a solution. There are many companies out there whose facilities are constructed for this very purpose. They have standardized processes and procedures to safely and efficiently process product. While your margins might not be as good as if you had done it yourself, they will be better than doing nothing at all. Also, you don't have to incur the production expenses (time, labor, packaging, planning, facility, product waste, etc.). At the end of the day, you have provided a menu option to your customer, while maintaining your current workload.

However, should you decide to undertake a cut fruit program, I feel that it's only appropriate to give you the steps and tools to do it safely. So here we go! Some process breaks are included in the procedure to help break it up into groups of steps for safe stopping points should the staff person need to do some other work in the department.

### Necessary equipment:

- A 2-compartment sink at a minimum (a 3-compartment sink is preferred and required by some Health Departments) with a drain-board on the end of the sink
- A refrigerated product storage area
- A digital metal stem thermometer or an infra-red thermometer
- Scrub brushes
- Sanitizing solutions (50PPM Chlorine or 100PPM Quat. Ammonia for products; 200PPM of either Chlorine or Quat. Ammonia for food contact surfaces.)
- Knives
- Preparation/cutting surface (plastic cutting board or stainless steel preferred)
- A means to cover the product once cleaned (bags, large plastic bins, etc.)
- Product packaging

First off, choose the products that you want to merchandise. Inspect for blemishes and ripeness. Use the best product that you can find. Product without punctures, skin ruptures and blemishes provide less area for bacteria to harbor. Besides, this isn't a recovery program. It's a program to highlight and offer your produce departments products and quality.

1. Pre-chill your chosen products to 41°F or below. Doing this will help to maintain internal product temperatures throughout the process.  
-----*Process Break, if needed*-----
2. Wash, rinse and sanitize the sink and scrub brushes.
3. Bring pre-chilled products out to the washing area.
4. Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm running water!
5. In one sink compartment, rinse products with **cold running** potable water to remove soil. If applicable to the commodity being washed in a bath, (i.e. whole tomatoes), **use water 10°F warmer than pulp temperature.**

- If using a bath, an appropriate sanitizer should be used in compliance with label directions.

6. Scrub commodities with a tough rind or peel, such as cantaloupe, carrots, cucumbers or citrus fruits with a clean and sanitized scrub brush. Clean and sanitize scrub brushes between uses to deter cross-contamination.
7. In the next sink compartment, rinse cleaned products with a sanitizer at 50ppm.



8. Cover and pre-chill products before preparation to 41°F or below. For example, pre-chill cantaloupe in a cooler before cutting.



-----Process Break, if needed-----

9. Wash, rinse and sanitize the work surfaces, cutting surfaces and knives.
10. Wash hands and use gloves appropriately, (training required), to cut fruits and vegetables according to your desired specifications.
11. Once fruits and vegetables are cut, cover, package, label, and reduce internal temperature to 41°F or below.
12. Dispose of all waste. Clean and sanitize all soiled utensils and work surfaces.