

Solutions for Excellence: Seven Safety & Sanitation Steps

The Red River Valley potato producers and packers are committed to excellent customer service and quality, as reflected by our “Solutions for Excellence” program. To communicate our industry’s initiatives with regard to key areas of production safety and sanitation, the RRVPGA—in partnership with its Members—drafted this document that outlines the best production practices evidenced in the Red River Valley potato industry today. These seven points specifically address the main concerns and demands of North American receivers and consumers.



1. Resource Conservation

-Preserving the land for future generations-

As one of the only U.S. agricultural regions employing dry land farming, the Red River Valley plays an important part in conservation of our natural habitat. Plentiful rain and rich fertile soil allows our members to grow potatoes on over 240,000 acres using dry land practices, without the aid of irrigation. Dry land practices also reduce rot and other crop problems associated with other heavily irrigated potato regions. Through this dependence on effective rainwater use, RRVPGA farmers have, since 1947, been naturally “green” and efficient producers of food, while playing a critical role in preserving our number one natural resource.



2. Water Purity

-Cleanliness & controls at every step –

Washplants in and around the cities of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks source water from local water treatment facilities. To decrease the amount of chemicals needed in the water purification process, water treatment facilities blend water from the Red and/or Red Lake Rivers. The water cleaning process removes silt, bacteria and some minerals. The only elements added to this water are minimal amounts of fluoride and chloramine to combat tooth decay and remove bacteria.

Washplants outside the Grand Forks/East Grand Forks area source water from providers with similar water purity practices. These sources include local water treatment facilities, rural water systems, below ground aquifers, artesian wells among additional alternative sources. Water treatment facilities, RRVPGA washplants, or government agencies such as the FDA or EPA typically monitor most sources for purity and cleanliness.



3. Chemical Safety

-Certified systems with minimal tolerance levels-

RRVPGA member producers reduce chemical use through Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies. In place of chemicals, IPM practices prescribe biological methods for pest control. To ensure minimal chemical use, formulations used in Red River Valley potatoes both in production and storage must be approved under strict EPA and FDA regulations. To minimize possible cross-contamination and maximize safety, chemicals are applied by certified chemical applicators. These individuals, whether washplant operators, farmers or employees, attend educational classes to become certified chemical applicators. The certification process, administered through state universities and extension services, includes 1.5 days of educational classes and a written exam through North Dakota or Minnesota Extension Services. Certified chemical applicators attend additional continuing education courses and renew licenses every three years to ensure familiarity with state-of-the-art products and procedures. The Red River Valley Potato Research Farm advocates safe chemical usage and may serve as an educational/certification training site.





4. Washplant Processes

-Bacteria removal and waste recycling precedes packing-

All Red River Valley potatoes are washed and rinsed with clean water from treatment facilities. As a precautionary measure, some washplants use Tsunami or minimal levels of chlorine to prevent additional bacterial growth in the water. After washing, water is recycled and used to transport potatoes via fluming. After fluming, water flows into a settling pond, where the solids (soil) are removed from the water. Excess water either evaporates or flows back into local sanitation systems. Workers then remove the solids and place them back on fertile fields of the Valley, thus assisting in the conservation of natural resources. Although potatoes are periodically and randomly sampled by FDA/EPA for residues, Red River Valley producers and shippers still recommended washing all produce before consumption.



5. Employee Education & Training

-Dedicated labor force focus on prevention-

RRVPGA Members support more than 3500 workers, making it one of the major employers in the region. Employee development is a long-term Red River Valley tradition because an educated employee is a safety practitioner. Member washplants conduct regular training sessions in proper plant and equipment operation due to primary dependence on mechanization within the industry. In addition, typical washplant employees are long-time Valley residents and locally educated. Due to the relatively low turnover rate, the year-round work and consistency in employees, RRVPGA members are able to form strong and safe work teams through training, education, and loyalty.



6. Optimal Facilities & Procedures

-Minimal handling and risk –

RRVPGA washplants routinely clean storage areas each season, in addition to maintaining clean washing environments at all times. Aside from general day-to-day upkeep by employers and employees, washplants have defined maintenance schedules including routine inspections by plant managers, pest control through an independent party, janitorial service, and a yearly total facility/technical maintenance program.

Employees rarely handle potatoes physically: a key benefit to potato packaging in minimizing germ transfer. In the event that employees need to hand-grade potatoes, washplant owners promote the use of rubber gloves, which decrease the possible germ transfer from hands to potatoes. Employers also promote basic sanitary procedures such as washing hands after using the restroom. The RRVPGA provides Member companies with educational sanitation practice placards and poster “reminders.”



7. Comprehensive tracking systems

-Monitoring and management to deliver quality-

RRVPGA members have the ability to track shipments directly back to each field and farmer, thus exemplifying our commitment to providing reliable, superior products. Whether or not they grow their own potatoes or contract from other growers, washplants have access to detailed records of the chemicals used on crops. Part of proper product management also involves the careful monitoring of potato storage sheds, many of which are equipped with the latest in climactic controls and provide extensive computerized data for analysis. From field - to washplant - to truck or storage - our industry has the infrastructure to answer most questions that may arise from one single shipment.

