- No EHEC-bacteria found in the Netherlands
- Dutch greenhouse vegetables uncontaminated – 6 reasons

No EHEC-bacteria found in the Netherlands

The new Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (nVWA) has not detected EHEC bacteria in the 136 samples that have been analysed in the past few days. These samples were taken in supermarkets, at wholesalers and at growers. More samples are currently being analysed. The results of this analysis will be released shortly. The nVWA will continue to take extra samples until the source of the EHEC infection in Germany has been confirmed with certainty. In the investigation, the nVWA has mainly concentrated on cucumbers. The Product Board for Horticulture has also taken samples of sweet peppers, aubergines, tomatoes and lettuce. The results of this analysis were also negative. All the samples were examined at the laboratory of the nVWA. This laboratory is the only accredited laboratory in the Netherlands for complete analysis relating to EHEC. The most recent results are published on www.vwa.nl

Sector based monitoring offers certainty

The risk that fruit vegetables of Dutch origin grown under glass (incl. cucumbers, tomatoes, sweet peppers, aubergines, salads) can become infected by the EHEC-bacteria is virtually excluded. We have naturally investigated whether infection with EHEC-bacteria can also occur with our produce. 6 reasons are stated below which explain why the risk of infection is so slight.

To make perfectly sure, the entire horticultural sector will continue sampling for E-coli infection as an extra control measure. E-coli-free declarations of individual lots do not guarantee safety. You can rest assured that the risk of Dutch produce being infected is nil, partly thanks to the system of inspection across the sector. The entire Dutch horticultural sector is performing these inspections in close consultation with the Dutch government and the new Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (nVWA). Preventive testing is being conducted via independent laboratories recommended by the German *Qualität und Sicherheit* (QS) food quality scheme. We will keep you informed of the latest analysis results of the samples (also see www.vwa.nl). The sector is convinced that the method of working offers sufficient safeguards about the safety of its produce for national and international customers. The monitoring being performed in the sector offers an additional form of inspection.

Hygiene is given top priority by Dutch fruit and vegetable growers and traders. Preventive measures, which include measures aimed at preventing bacterial infection, are a standard element of operational management. This approach is safeguarded by the certification awarded to companies. Dutch growers and traders work according to Hygiene Codes. These codes stipulate preventive control measures which are monitored by the nVWA. The companies are also certified for their observance of these measures by GlobalGAP, the food safety

certificate for supermarkets, or QS, the German food safety scheme etc. Working hygienically is one of the basic principles with which the Dutch vegetable sector presents itself on international markets. Moreover, Germany is largest importer of Dutch horticultural produce. The grower, time of harvest, origin of the produce and the cultivation process are monitored and can be traced within four hours.

Dutch greenhouse vegetables uncontaminated – 6 reasons:

Various factors make it highly **unlikely** that infection by EHEC-bacteria can occur in produce grown under glass in the Netherlands:

1. **Fertilizing:** In the production process of vegetables grown in greenhouses (incl. cucumbers, tomatoes, sweet peppers, aubergines, salads) no use is make of animal derived fertilizer, so that infection with this bacteria is highly unlikely.
2. **Water use**: Infection via water is also highly improbable: in greenhouse growing of (fruit) vegetables the water used is almost entirely water sourced from closed circuits.
3. **Growth substrate**: In greenhouse growing of vegetables substrate is used as the growing medium, incl. substrate made from German basalt. Irrigation is done using dripper systems. This system is also used to fertilize the crops. The growing medium is also called mineral wool. It is enclosed in an outer layer of plastic. The water and the nutrients are dripped onto this medium and then absorbed by it. No animal derived fertilizer is used.
4. **Cultivation method**: The majority of (fruit) vegetables grown in greenhouses are cultivated in/or 'gutters'. These gutters are placed around 30 to 40 cm above the soil. The actual soil is covered with plastic or even concrete. Contact between the produce and the soil is not possible.
5. **Logistics**: The Netherlands has an Early Warning Response system whereby traders, growers' associations and packing stations provide thousands of measuring data. This enables inspections to be made in a highly focussed manner. Produce can be traced back to grower level within 4 hours.
6. **Food safety**: All cultivation and production locations of certified Dutch companies have the strictest certification. All growing companies have a minimum of GlobalGAP certification. Packing stations and distribution centres also have the most stringent forms of certification such as HACCP, BRC, IFS. These certification schemes, which perform annual independent audits to check compliance, devote ample attention to phytosanitary hygiene measures. Where manual labour is involved, the strictest personal control measures apply whereby contamination by human and/or animal bacteria is prevented.

More information?

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