

# Health Unit Media Release

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## **Food Safety Awareness: Be an informed shopper!**

May is a great time for food safety awareness. **In Leeds, Grenville and Lanark Counties, the focus is on increasing consumer awareness when purchasing food.**

There are many wonderful places to shop for food in the tri-county area including supermarkets, farmer's markets, specialty food stores, food festivals and at the farm gate. The safety of our food supply is monitored by several levels of government and under the jurisdiction of different ministries. **Locally, public health inspectors visit food premises on a routine basis; however not all foods are regulated or inspected.** Private homes are not considered to be a food premises, therefore foods prepared in these kitchens are not inspected. Farmer's markets and the farm gate also have some exemptions and are not routinely inspected; however, they are responsible to ensure the food they offer for sale is wholesome. **While consumers are encouraged to shop locally, they must bear some responsibility for the choices they make when shopping for food.**

It is important to observe how the food you plan to purchase is handled and stored. Never hesitate to ask if the product was produced in an inspected facility. In Ontario, only meat that has been inspected at a licensed plant can be offered for sale. Only milk that is pasteurized can be offered for sale. **The reason these requirements are in place is to prevent exposure to potentially serious diseases.**

**The following tips may help you make safe choices:**

- Purchase perishable products last and go straight home with your groceries
- Place raw meat in the lower section of the grocery cart away from ready to eat foods
- Use a designated bag for raw meat products
- Choose ready to eat foods that have protective packaging intact to prevent contamination
- Choose products that have proper labels that include where the product was produced
- Do not purchase cracked eggs
- Choose fruits and veggies that are free from cracks or damaged, as dirt and germs from the outside may enter the inside where they cannot be washed away
- Avoid snacking while shopping, as most foods are not ready to eat without washing, and your hands may not be clean
- Clean reusable bags and containers between uses
- Clean your hands after shopping and before you prepare and eat food
- Handle and store food safely by keeping hot foods hot, cold foods refrigerated, separating raw and ready to eat foods, starting with a clean preparation area and clean hands

**For more information on food safety, check the health unit website at [www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org), or call the health unit at 613-345-5685 in Brockville, 613-283-2740 in Smiths Falls or the Health ACTION Line at 1-800-660-5853 and ask to speak to a public health inspector.**

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