

Microgreens: What You Need to Know

If you have more questions regarding microgreens, please contact Amanda Olson at amolson@nd.gov.

What are microgreens, and how are they different from sprouts?

“Microgreens are a popular and versatile crop, including a wide variety of plants (from mustard to radish) that are cut for sale when they have just developed their first true leaves. These are not to be confused with sprouts, which are harvested with the seed attached and without any leaves (*Moe, J. 2020, Microgreens and Produce Safety, Desert Farming Initiative, University of Nevada, Reno*)

[Microgreens and Produce Safety | Extension | University of Nevada, Reno \(unr.edu\)](#)

See more about sprouts vs microgreens below:

Are microgreens safe to consume in child nutrition programs?

Microgreens are a safe and nutritious addition to child nutrition programs. This spring, the North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) and the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) partnered with Jamestown Public Schools to introduce microgreens at lunch. These microgreens were grown and harvested by Legendary Greens.

Legendary Greens ([Legendary Greens](#)) and other producers that grow microgreens in North Dakota adhere to rigorous food safety standards throughout the growing process. Precautions include sterilized soil amendments, equipment, water, supplies, utensils, and more. Hand washing and wearing gloves are also crucial to maintaining safety during harvesting. Additionally, growers use UV light to eliminate potential pathogens, ensuring that microgreens are safe for consumption.

Sprouts are not safe for CNP and are prohibited from serving to children by the FDA Food Code (pages 104 - 105). The FDA Food Code prohibits the service or sale of raw seed sprouts in a ready-to-eat form to highly susceptible populations (e.g., children who are nine years of age or less, and individuals with weakened immune

systems who receive food in a school daycare setting or similar facility). [Food Code 2022 | FDA](#)

Do you need to wash microgreens when you purchase them for your child nutrition program?

If you purchase microgreens from a local producer for your child nutrition program, there is no need to wash them before use. Similar to pre-washed salad mixes that state "washed 3 times or prewashed," washing them again could introduce new pathogens that were not originally present. Microgreens are grown and harvested in sterile and clean environments, with producers following strict food safety practices.

However, it is always a good idea to ask local producers about their adherence to good agricultural practices to ensure they maintain safe food standards for your students. This helps to confirm that microgreens are handled and prepared in a way that prioritizes safety and hygiene. If you need help with what questions to ask, please contact Amanda Olson.

More about microgreens: Notes from Washington State Department of Agriculture Fact Sheet

Summary: SFAs have used microgreens for salad bars and on sandwiches. Here are a couple anecdotes SFAs shared about microgreens in their final grant reports in Washington state.

“One of the students' favorite items was microgreens. We purchased baby sunflower microgreens directly from a local farmer, who gave a presentation to our students about how the microgreens were grown and what goes into cultivating the plants. This was a huge success for our students and nutrition program as a whole.”

In Jamestown Public Schools (ND) we saw a similar success. The students were more inclined to put it on their tray once they knew what it was.

Here is the response from Washington State to SFA's:

“It’s true that sprouts are considered a high-risk commodity. For that reason, FDA has separate regulatory criteria for this crop that dives deeper into seed selection, environmental monitoring, increased water testing and more.

That said, microgreens are not sprouts. Under our federal regulations and common market standards, they are treated like all other fruits and vegetables in terms of safe handling practices. Here is an excerpt from FDA’s [“Standards for Growing, Harvesting, Packing and Holding Produce for Human Consumption Industry Guidance”](#) for further evidence and background.

“Microgreens and sprouts are distinct commodities. Historically, the primary criterion FDA has used to distinguish between the two product categories has been the growth stage of the leaves (Ref. 221). Sprouts are usually harvested when the cotyledons (or seed leaves) are still under-developed and true leaves have not begun to emerge. In contrast, microgreens reach a later stage of growth, typically associated with the emergence of “true” leaves. Microgreens are also typically grown in soil or substrate and harvested above the soil or substrate line. Because microgreens are not sprouts, they are not subject to the requirements in subpart M.”

The microgreens purchased should meet that definition of later stage growth and be harvested above the soil/substrate line. Another resource on this topic is the [WSDA Factsheet: Selling Sprouts and Microgreens.](#)”

More resources regarding microgreens:

[Dakota Gardener: Gardening in the Winter — Extension and Ag Research News \(ndsu.edu\)](#)

[Best Practices for Handling Fresh Produce in Schools | Food and Nutrition Service \(usda.gov\)](#)