



Fresh Hops Harvesting and Handling Tips

*Laura Siegle, Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent, Amelia County, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Holly Scoggins, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, School of Environmental and Plant Sciences, Virginia Tech
Amber Vallotton, Fresh Produce Food Safety Team Coordinator, School of Environmental and Plant Sciences, Virginia Tech*

Virginia Cooperative Extension strongly recommends that all hop growers develop an on-farm food safety plan. Hops are a food product! A good food safety plan will ensure that you assess risks at pre-plant, production, harvest, and post-harvest stages; monitor practices to mitigate those risks; take corrective actions when practices are not effective at mitigating risks or something unexpected occurs; and keep good records of your practices. There are excellent resources available to educate and assist you in this endeavor (see below). This plan should include the following basic, common-sense approaches to fresh or "wet" hops quality and safety. **At minimum:**

- 1. Comply with all pesticide selection, use, and recordkeeping regulations.**
- 2. Workers and volunteers must wash hands prior to picking and handling hops.**
- 3. Handle hops in a clean environment: no animals, fuel, food, glass, etc.**
- 4. Hold harvested bines and picked hops in shade; move picked hops immediately to a cool environment to remove field heat and slow the degradation of chemical compounds.**
- 5. Deliver wet hops as soon as possible; immediate delivery is ideal, and growers report greatest buyer satisfaction and least loss of quality when hops are delivered within 24 hours of harvest.**

Again, this is a bare-minimum checklist for handling fresh hops. Buyers and brewers may want assurance that your hops were produced and handled in accordance with industry safety and quality standards; in order to provide this assurance to brewers, consider participating in an industry GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) program. For a hops-specific resource, utilize the food safety "Best Practices" Module program from USA Hops, designed especially for smaller growers. Completion of the self-certification program (Module 1) will equip you with a food safety checklist of practices for providing a safe, high-quality product to the brewer, under the umbrella of a reputable industry program. You may also find it useful to share your completion certificate with brewers and buyers seeking information about the safety of your product. Because industry leaders strongly believe that all growers, large and small, should follow practices for providing a safe, reputable product, the Food Safety/Harvest Practices documents from the module are available free of charge online even if you choose not to seek a completion certificate under this particular program. Visit <https://www.usahops.org/growers/food-safety.html> for more information.

The above list of hop handling suggestions and/or the USA Hops program are **NOT** replacements for any applicable state and local food laws or the Food Safety Modernization Act. For additional resources, visit <https://ext.vt.edu/agriculture/commercial-horticulture/hops.html>. You can also learn more on the Virginia Fresh Produce Food Safety page at <https://www.hort.vt.edu/producesafety/index.html>.