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Current approaches such as inspections, audits, and end product testing cannot detect the distribution and dynamics of microbial contamination. Despite the implementation of current food safety management systems, foodborne outbreaks linked to fresh produce continue to be reported. A microbial assessment scheme and statistical modeling were used to systematically assess the microbial performance of core control and assurance activities in five Kenyan fresh produce processing and export companies. Generalized linear mixed models and correlated random-effects joint models for multivariate clustered data followed by empirical Bayes estimates enabled the analysis of the probability of contamination across critical sampling locations (CSLs) and factories as a random effect. Salmonella spp. and Listeria monocytogenes were not detected in the final products. However, none of the processors attained the maximum safety level for environmental samples. Escherichia coli was detected in five of the six CSLs, including the final product. Among the processing-environment samples, the hand or glove swabs of personnel revealed a higher level of predicted contamination with E. coli, and 80% of the factories were E. coli positive at this CSL. End products showed higher predicted probabilities of having the lowest level of food safety compared with raw materials. The final products were E. coli positive despite the raw materials being E. coli negative for 60% of the processors. There was a higher probability of contamination with coliforms in water at the inlet than in the final rinse water. Four (80%) of the five assessed processors had poor to unacceptable counts of Enterobacteriaceae on processing surfaces. Personnel-, equipment-, and product-related hygiene measures to improve the performance of preventive and intervention measures are recommended.

General information
State: Published
Organisations: National Food Institute, Research group for Genomic Epidemiology
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Number of pages: 12
Pages: 177-188
Publication date: 2017
Peer-reviewed: Yes

Publication information
Journal: Journal of Food Protection
Volume: 80
Issue number: 1
ISSN (Print): 0362-028X
Ratings:
BFI (2019): BFI-level 1
Web of Science (2019): Indexed yes
BFI (2018): BFI-level 1
Web of Science (2018): Indexed yes
BFI (2017): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2017): CiteScore 1.63 SJR 0.761 SNIP 0.823
Web of Science (2017): Impact factor 1.51
Web of Science (2017): Indexed yes
BFI (2016): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2016): CiteScore 1.68 SJR 0.769 SNIP 0.811
Web of Science (2016): Impact factor 1.417
Web of Science (2016): Indexed yes
BFI (2015): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2015): CiteScore 2.03 SJR 0.954 SNIP 1.024
Web of Science (2015): Impact factor 1.609
Web of Science (2015): Indexed yes
BFI (2014): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2014): CiteScore 1.94 SJR 0.914 SNIP 0.953
Web of Science (2014): Impact factor 1.849
Web of Science (2014): Indexed yes
BFI (2013): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2013): CiteScore 2.11 SJR 1.101 SNIP 1.09