CAPS Water Testing (*Updated May 2024)*

CAPS REQUIRES an **annual water test for farms when water from a private source** (well, spring, etc.) comes in contact with produce for sale during harvest or post-harvest handling (for washing, cooling, cleaning, sorting, etc.). Water test essentials:

- The minimum water test standard is **no detectable generic *E. coli* bacteria** per 100ml.
- Uploaded test result for the calendar year is due annually by July 15 (June 15 for CAPS+).
- **The presence of *E. coli* bacteria will prevent a farm from attaining CAPS accreditation**.
- The **presence of coliform bacteria**, although a potential problem that should be resolved, will NOT prevent a farm from attaining CAPS accreditation.*
- If you use municipal water on produce, you do not need to test it.
- If water never touches any produce for sale, testing is recommended, but NOT required.
- For more on harvest and post-harvest water requirements for farms covered under FSMA, check out this VAAFM publication.

As always, feel free to contact me (CAPS Coordinator Hans Estrin) via email or text/call (hestrin@uvm.edu, 802 380 2109) with any questions or concerns.

* If your sample tests positive for coliform, that means that some amount of soil has contaminated your sample. This could be caused by a problem with your well, spring, or water line, which could lead to further contamination. Thus, it is important to inspect and potentially repair or remedy the contamination (e.g. take a year to resolve via resampling, well shocking), especially if this water source is also used for drinking water. See the VT DOH information about coliform HERE and instructions for well and spring disinfection HERE.

Further Instructions and Explanation:

The VT Department of Health water testing lab (shown in action below) is the least expensive and most convenient way for most CAPS farms to test their water. If you want a test from the VT DOH, you MUST get the sample there DAY-OF or OVERNIGHT.

How to work with the VT DOH water testing lab:

1) Pick up the phone and call the lab at 802-338-4724.

2) Have them send you one (or more) "NU" water test kits for $15/each.

Descriptions of the drinking water tests and instructions are HERE. The "NU" test returns the MPN ("most probable number") of *E.coli* and coliform in a 100ml sample. This number gives you more information, if you get a positive result.

3) Collect sample Monday- Thursday morning following the instructions in the test kit.

Lab Testing must begin within 30 hours from the time of collection or it will be rejected.

4) Choose your method for getting the sample to the lab.

- Drop the sample in-person at a drinking water drop location by deadline.
- Drop the sample in-person at the VT DOH lab: 359 South Park Drive, Colchester
- Mail or currier the sample overnight to the lab.
  USPS: P.O. Box 1125, Burlington, VT 05402-1125
  Fedex/UPS: 359 South Park Drive, Colchester, VT 05446

Other options for water testing:

- Endyne Labs are twice the price per test ($30), but a good alternative, with lab locations in Lebanon and Williston. They also have a limited free currier service throughout the region which can make the cost competitive with state lab fee plus overnight shipping.

- Agricultural Water Testing Labs in Vermont and Neighboring States publication from VT Agency of Agriculture

- National Water Quality Testing Labs Map