Fresh produce is an important addition to a healthy diet. However, some produce, including sprouts, have been implicated in foodborne illness. Raw and lightly cooked sprouts, especially alfalfa, clover and mung bean sprouts, have been associated with foodborne illness in a number of outbreaks. Microorganisms already on the seeds or introduced during the sprouting process grow quickly during the ideal conditions of germination and sprouting. Because of this, it is now required to have a variance and a HACCP plan to sprout seeds or beans in a restaurant environment.

Sprouts are defined as the germinating form of seeds and beans. Examples of sprouts include:
- Alfalfa
- Clover
- Sunflower
- Broccoli
- Mustard
- Radish
- Garlic
- Dill
- Mung
- Kidney/pinto/navy beans
- Soy beans
- Wheat berries (wheat grass)

There is no single treatment so far that has been shown to completely eliminate pathogens on seeds or sprouts that cause foodborne illness without affecting germination or yield. Therefore, every precautionary measure should be taken to prevent high levels of bacteria from growing on the seeds or sprouts. Using the following retail sprout industry "Best Practices" will help ensure a safe and healthy product. These best practices are available online at: http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/ucm078758.htm.

Further information is available at the FDA website, http://www.fda.gov, by entering “sprouts” in the search window or on the OHA webpage at: http://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyEnvironments/FoodSafety/Pages/variance.aspx.