

Cleaning Tools for Produce Farms

Farms of various sizes all have tools and equipment that need to be cleaned and sanitized. This equipment varies in how well it has been designed to be cleaned; its level of hygienic design (go.uvm.edu/hygienicdesign). Some items require lots of effort and specific tools to clean adequately while others are straight-forward. What's the best brush to clean totes? Is spending money on an expensive squeegee to get water off the floor worth it? This blog post will highlight some of the things to look for in cleaning tools and supplies for use on the farm.

Janitorial supplies on the market are generally targeted towards hospitality, schools, or restaurants, but there isn't much out there specific for agriculture. Though not required, it might be a good idea to invest in tools for the farm that are designed for the food manufacturing industry. These will be durable items that promote the cleaning of food contact surfaces, and reduce the risk of spreading germs and contaminants. The right cleaning tool, used appropriately and regularly, can improve produce safety and also reduce postharvest spoilage.

The first question to ask yourself is "Does it need to be cleaned? And, if so, how frequently?" Not everything needs to be kept sparkling clean, and not everything should be cleaned with soap and water. There are various easy ways to achieve "clean" based on the item's intended purpose. Starting with a visual inspection you can ask yourself some of the following questions:

- **Is it a food contact surface?**
 - Zone 1 – Critical to clean, regularly
- **Is it adjacent to food contact surfaces?**
 - Zone 2 – Very important to clean, regularly
- **Is it contributing to a dirty environment?**
 - Should be cleaned routinely
- **Is this equipment generally a wet environment or dry?**
 - It may not be a good idea to introduce water in an otherwise dry production line. Dry soil or leaves can be removed with a vacuum or broom and dust pan.

You can learn more about the Zone Concept in an article from Penn State Extension (extension.psu.edu/food-safety-modernization-act-the-zone-concept).



Once you have determined the level of clean that is needed you can choose the best tactics and tools to complete the task. To learn more about the process of cleaning and sanitizing read our guide (go.uvm.edu/clean-sanitize-disinfect).

We also have standard operating procedures (SOPs) to clean specific equipment on our SCRUB resources page (go.uvm.edu/scrubresources).

How Will You Clean Your Cleaning Tools?

One of the key questions to ask is how cleanable are the tools I use to clean the other equipment and tools? It may seem like a silly question, but think about it for a moment. That brush you use to clean food contact surfaces is essentially a food contact surface itself. Would you eat off of it? We've explored tools on the market and have tried to summarize them below based on consideration of how they can be cleaned.

Vikan/Remco Products

The majority of the equipment shown below are tools manufactured by the company Vikan out of Denmark, or Remco, the US manufacturer of these products. They are used in the food industry and designed to be easily cleaned. We have found their design to be superior to the general cleaning tools more regularly available locally. They have implemented various features like a smooth surface texture, ergonomic handles, and Ultra Safe Technology (UST) which is brush design that has the bristles molded into the handle of the brush as opposed to the more traditional drill and staple or resin-set designs. You will note that these tools have

minimal seams, holes, and crevices. Where there is a seam, such where the head screws onto a separate handle, the connection is made to come apart and be easily cleaned.

Cleaning Tools

Brushes

When you think of cleaning tools, brushes seem to be what comes to mind first. A brush should be of high quality to withstand repeated use. Handle shape and length is important



(A) Round Scrub Brush, (B) UST Bench Brush, (C) UST Short Handle Brush, (D) Short Handle Brush (E) 16" Long Handled UST Brush, (F) Ultra-Slim Cleaning Brush with Long Handle, (G) 26" Ultra Hygiene Handle, (H) Bottle Brush, (J) Narrow Head Long Handle Brush, (K) 2" Tube Brush for Handle, (L) Dish Brush with Scraper, (M) Stiff Tank Brush

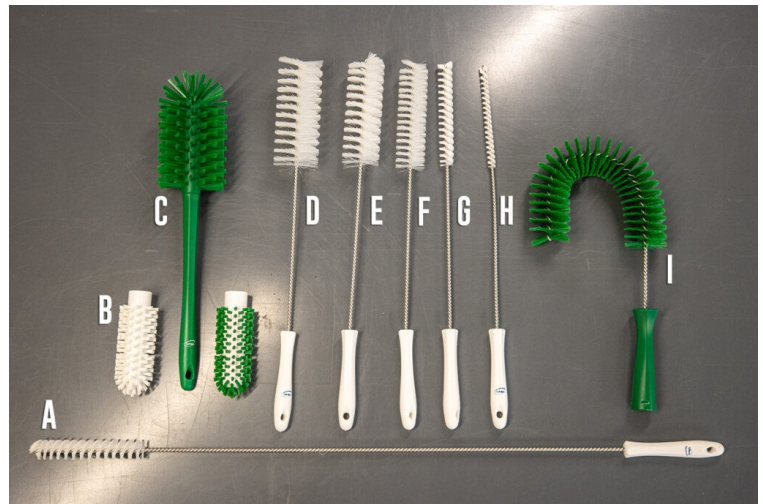
so it is ergonomic to use. It should be properly sized for the object being cleaned. The head should be small enough to reach the smallest corners and the handle should be long enough to let you reach those corners.

The key design features that separate one brush from another are:

1. Bristles (soft/stiff) - Drill & staple vs. resin set or UST Molded
2. Head (Size & Shape)
3. Handle (Length)

Tank Brushes

This design has bristles that wrap around the head which are good for getting into corners or scrubbing walls of equipment.



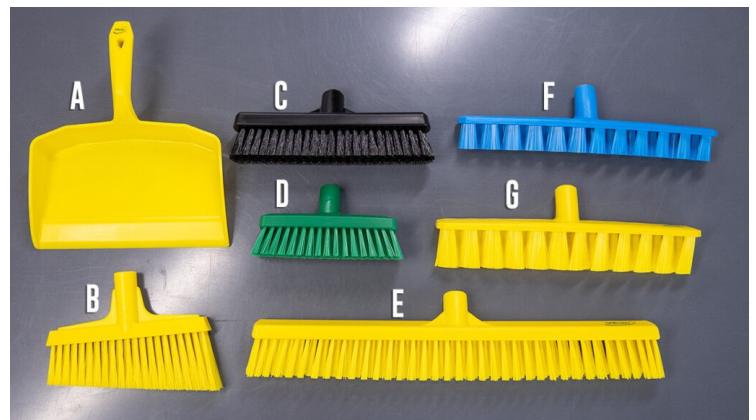
(A) Long Handle Tube Brush, (B) Tube Brush for Handle 2" D, (C) Bottle Brush, (D) 2.4" Tube Brush, (E) 2" Tube Brush, (F) 1.5" Tube Brush, (G) .9" Tube Brush, (H) .4" Tube Brush, (I) Hook Brush

Brooms

Floor Broom – Used for sweeping the open floor or large surfaces or spaces.

Angled broom – Gets into corners or smaller spaced with greater ease.

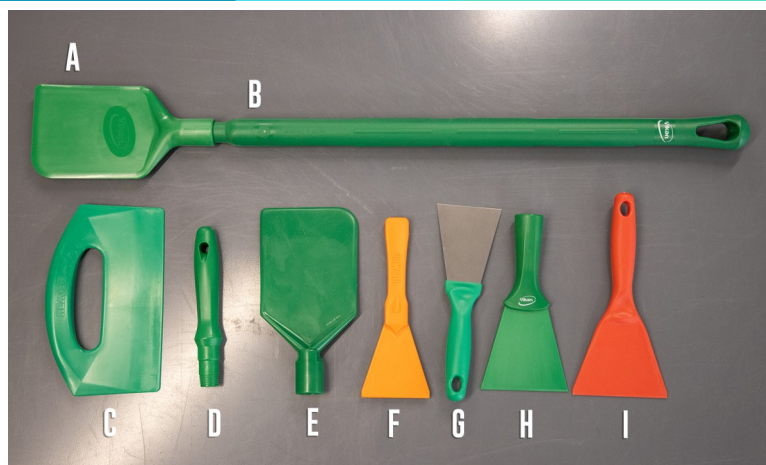
Deck Brush – Like a small broom but meant for scrubbing, not just sweeping.



(A) Remco Dustpan, (B) Angle Cut Lobby Broom, (C) 12" Deck Scrub, (D) Compact Wall/Deck Scrub, (E) 24" Floor Broom, Medium, (F) 12" UST Deck Scrub, (G) 16" UST Medium Push Broom

Scrapers

Scrapers are helpful for getting stubborn and dried debris off of surfaces when doing deep cleans. Scrapers are available in both plastic or metal, hand held or extendable with a longer handle that can easily be screwed on to many of the tools.



(A) Stiff Paddle Scraper, (B) 26" Ultra Hygiene Handle, (C) Bench Scraper, (D) Mini Color-coded Handle, (E) Soft Paddle Scraper, (F) 3" Polypropylene Stiff Hand Scraper, (G) 3" Stainless Steel Scraper, (H) Nylon Scraper with Euro Threads, (I) 4" Polypropylene Stiff Hand Scraper

Squeegees

Surface squeegee – Handheld squeegees are great for sweeping water off of counters and tables. They can remove more water than a rag or sponge more easily and allow the surface to dry faster.



Single piece molded rubber squeegee (Left), Double edge for better contact with replaceable cartridge (Center), Replaceable foam squeegee for tile floors (Right)

Floor squeegee – You do get what you pay for in floor squeegees. Fancier ones are easier to keep clean, and have a softer rubber edge making better contact with the floor. That being said, a basic and cheap squeegee may be just the tool you need to help rid of water especially if you're not pushing

the puddles off your concrete currently.

Mops, Sponges & Scrubbers

Mops are needed to scrub floors when things are dried on and a broom just isn't cutting it. By adding water and a detergent you can get your floor to another level of clean by using a mop.

Sponges are like a mop for smaller surfaces. They hold soapy water in them to aid in scrubbing or spot cleaning small equipment. These often don't hold up very long and should be considered a disposable solution.



These industrial scrubbers are available in a soft, medium or heavy duty pad. The handles clamp onto the pads easily and are available in multiple colors and can be hand held or used with an attached handle to extend your reach.

Additionally there are scrubbing pads available for use with either a handheld holder or one that can be attached to a handle. Sponges and scrapers are excellent for taking off material but often considered a one time use as the are porous and don't always come clean after use.

These 10" utility scrubbers are available in soft, medium or heavy duty for big scrubbing jobs either by hand or with a long pole. The pads are replaceable and meant to be "one time use."

Buckets & Caddies

Almost any ole bucket without holes will do for cleaning, though you may consider dedicating one or two specifically for cleaning purposes to keep them clean and available when needed. This also can help prevent cross-



contamination. A unique color keeps it identifiable as the cleaning bucket and reduces the chance of it walking off and being used for something else.

In addition to a bucket used for soapy water, or sanitizer solution, another bucket or caddy may be helpful to keep all the tools in one location as a ready-to-go kit. Make sure all your tools are cleaned, sanitized and dry before packing them up.

Shelves & Hangers

Having the right tools in the right location makes it easier to find the tools and promote the use of them. When the brush is right next to the equipment it's easier for everyone to find it and it is more likely to be used. There are a variety of cleaning



These 3 or 5 tool hangers "Hygienic Hi-Flex Wall Bracket System" can easily be easily disassembled to be cleaned.

carts, shelves or hangers to aid in organizing these cleaning supplies. The most common hanger is a three hook hanger to hold a broom, brush, and squeegee. Often placed near the door since cleaning the floors happens at the end of the day just before you leave the premises. Vikan has a bucket bracket that holds their buckets upside down with a hook for the lid so everything can dry between uses.

Another organizational unit is a shelf to hold the soap, and a few hooks to hold smaller brushes. Placing this near a sink is good for organization and promoting cleaning.

There are also wire hangers made just for spray bottles, gallon jugs or gloves, so they have a dedicated location for storage and use.

Hoses & Sprayers

Having access to water makes cleaning easier. Using a high quality hose that's in an easy to use location is key in a wash/pack environment. Read our blog post on hoses for specifics about hoses, reels, and nozzles (go.uvm.edu/hoses).

PPE & Inspection

Commercial cleaners and sanitizers are often sold as concentrates and pose a chemical risk and need to be handled with caution. Be sure to read the label and follow the instructions for the products you choose for your personal protection. Proper personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn as instructed including gloves, goggles, aprons, and other protective apparel to protect your skin.

Other tools that may aid in thorough cleaning may include flashlights or mirrors to see in hard to reach locations. These can be on an extendable handle to reach further than you may be able to get at with your arms.

Detergents

There are specific detergents that work well for cleaning up after produce and there are other options that go deeper than household dish soap.

There are fancier soaps (\$200/L) that offer low foaming but the benefits may not outweigh the cost.

Labeling

Common tools used for labeling on the farm include:

- Laminated cards or posters
- Label maker

- Color coding (even with electrical tape or spray paint)
- Chalkboard markers
- Grease Pencil
- Permanent marker
- Masking Tape

Color Coding

The 5 core colors commonly available for cleaning tools are: red, green, yellow, white and blue. Select tools are available in additional colors.

Colors can be assigned to for different purposes a few suggestions are:

- ☐ White – Product Contact (Food hoe & shovels)
- ☐ Yellow – Packshed, non-product contact areas (floors)
- ☐ Blue – Coolers
- ☐ Green – Washline Equipment (Rinse conveyor, brush washer, tanks & tubs)
- ☐ Black – Drains
- ☐ Grey – Trash
- ☐ Red – Bathrooms
- ☐ Orange – Animal area
- ☐ Purple – Kitchen/Break area
- ☐ Pink, orange, purple, lime – Free choice!

Sanitizers

Sanitizers need to be selected and used according to their label. as The concentration of a product used in vegetable wash water will be different that that used on food contact surfaces. To learn more about the process of cleaning and sanitizing and common sanitizers, read our guide (go.uvm.edu/clean-sanitize-disinfect).

Dispensing and applying sanitizers is made easier with appropriate and dedicated containers. To learn more about the options, read our guide (go.uvm.edu/sanitizerdispensers).

Spray Bottles & Rags

Spray bottles can be useful to mix up the correct concentration of sanitizer for cleaning primary food contact surfaces.

Retailers Carrying Cleaning Supplies

Different retailers display their products in various ways, and downloading the manufacturers buyers guide to find the part numbers you are looking for is one of the best ways to find exactly what you are looking for. This is available directly from Remco's home page (remcoproducts.com).



These twin neck bottles are great for safely dispensing small quantities of sanitizer from the main tote to a container that holds a diluted solution for everyday use.



This bottle is in a wire bracket "3.5" Diam Bottle Rack" that can be screwed to the wall in an easy to reach location.

Once you have the manufacturers part number you can find the products through a variety of online retailers, who may also have a product catalog which may be easier to use in order to find what you are looking for.

Potential vendors include:

RS Quality

<https://rsquality.com/>

Swish (Vermont distributor)

<https://www.swishusa.com/>

Webstaurant

<https://www.webstaurantstore.com/>

Grainger

<http://www.grainger.com/>

Uline

<https://www.uline.com/>

Zoro

<http://www.zoro.com/>

Union Jack Tools

<https://www.unionjacktools.com/>

Nelson Jameson

<https://nelsonjameson.com/>

Local hardware stores

Big box building supply stores



Videos, photos, and web version of this guide:



go.uvm.edu/cleaningtools