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For Immediate Release

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All Washed Up – Those Reusable Cloth Bags

There has been a significant increase in the use of reusable shopping bags. Many stores even offer discounts for using cloth bags. While reusable cloth bags are convenient and help reduce the use of plastic bags, they also need proper care and cleaning to prevent the spread of disease.

In a joint food safety research report published by the University of Arizona and Loma Linda University in California, it was stated that reusable grocery bags can be a breeding ground for dangerous foodborne bacteria and pose a serious risk to public health. The study found that public awareness of potential risk was low and that 97 percent of those interviewed never wash their reusable bags.

Reusable bags, if not properly washed between uses, create the potential for cross-contamination of foods. This happens when raw meat products and foods traditionally eaten uncooked (fruits and vegetables) are carried in the same bag, either together or in subsequent uses. Large numbers of bacteria were found in the bags when packaged meats leaked. Researchers also found that storing reusable bags in the back seat or trunk of the car for two hours increased bacteria growth 10-fold.

Therefore, it is important to store cloth bags for food use in a place where contamination is minimal. It is also necessary to wash cloth bags regularly. Simply washing the reusable cloth bags between uses in the machine or by hand with soap and water is as effective as using bleach. Washing reduces bacteria growth by 99.9 percent.

While the use of reusable cloth bags are great for helping to save the environment, remember that it is important to consider personal and family health by properly caring for those reusable bags. For more information on food safety topics contact the Flint Hills Extension District office in Cottonwood Falls at (620) 273-6491 or the office in Council Grove at (620) 767-5136.

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