

Food Safety Alert – 1/02/07

An AP news story posted on the Monterey County Herald website says that the federal government and the leafy green industry are scrambling to make produce safe before the start of the spring planting season. The new guidelines are to be in place by April. They are meant to prevent contamination from “field to fork.” Currently, members of Congress are asking the FDA and CDC to report on what went wrong as well as provide some solution that will reduce the risk of tainted vegetables from reaching consumer’s tables. California will have a marketing agreement in place by March. In the agreement, those packers and shippers who take part will receive a label that indicates their greens follow stricter practices. “Bryan Silbermann, president of the Produce Marketing Association, was quoted as saying, ‘I think we have to show the consuming public as well as government officials that we can manage this.’” Since the E. coli outbreak in spinach, lawmakers in Washington have been pushing for one agency to be in charge of food safety. That agency would be responsible for requiring regular inspections and may be given the authority to do food recalls.

http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/search/search_results.htm?pubName=montereyherald&orderBy=date&pageStart=1&sitesToSearch=montereyherald%2Cmcherald%2Crealcities&pageSize=10&fieldsToSearch=HEADLINE%2CFORSEARCH%2CLEAD%2CBYLINE&queryType=all&searchSelect=article&query=E.+coli

The top local story of 2006, according to the *Monterey County Herald*, was the E. coli contamination of spinach. Readers of the *Herald* were asked to select the stories that made the biggest impact on the Central Coast. It was chosen overwhelmingly. The brief article goes on to say that it is unsure of the financial losses as they have not yet been assessed.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/16356490.htm>

The E. coli outbreak in spinach was also the biggest story of 2006, says the Hollister Free Lance. Here is the link to that story:

<http://www.freelancenews.com/news/contentview.asp?c=201380>

An article posted on the USMedicine.com website indicates that the CDC is still looking into the causes of the E. coli outbreak at Taco Bell that sickened more than 71 people in late November and early December. At the height of the outbreak, Taco Bell had closed more than 60 restaurants. While it has not tested positive, shredded lettuce is being blamed as the source or vehicle of contamination. The CDC is working with state health officials as well as the FDA and USDA to find the cause. Onions of any kind have been cleared in this outbreak, yet the lettuce, cheese and meat are all still being looked at.

<http://www.usmedicine.com/dailyNews.cfm?dailyID=304>

Salinas Mayor Dennis Donohue and Assemblywoman Anna Caballero met Dec. 29 in Salinas with local agriculture leaders and the California Secretary of Agriculture. They discussed rebuilding the industry and its image following months of being beating up by the media. The meeting was held at the Grower-Shipper Association office in Salinas and was attended by groups of farmers and politicians. They also discussed efforts to complete investigations into the spinach outbreak and new regulations on food safety.

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2007701010312>

An AP news article appearing on the *San Jose Mercury News* website says that some possible changes to food safety may include: irradiating produce; placing packing chips in boxes of produce to make it easier to identify the source; testing irrigation water more frequently and not using overhead sprinklers if the field has been fertilized with composted manure; certifying manure that is used for fertilizing; doing more batch testing at processing facilities; ensuring that produce is kept below certain temperatures from harvest to distribution at grocery stores; and, increasing consumer education on preventing the spread of contamination through food preparation.

<http://www.mercurynews.com/mlid/mercurynews/16358154.htm>