

Food Safety Alert – 1/04/07

An article in the *Insurance Journal* repeats much of what we already know about the recent E. coli outbreaks in spinach and in lettuce. It begins by stating that both the leafy greens industry and the federal government want to change procedures for growers and shippers prior to the spring growing season. Members of Congress are asking the FDA and the CDC to report on what went wrong and how to fix it. There is even talk of creating one centralized agency to deal with all food. States are even taking the lead. In Iowa, the head of the Department of Inspections and Appeals is pushing the state to adopt the 2005 FDA Food Code. (Iowa has not updated its code since 1997). In California, farmers are poised to adopt a marketing agreement that would provide labels for grower-shippers that adhere to stricter agricultural practices. In New Jersey, state officials want to establish a task force that is meant to look at ways to improve food safety. "This whole issue has gathered significant momentum in light of the recent outbreaks," said Dr. David Acheson, chief medical officer for food safety at the Food and Drug Administration."

The article also states that outbreaks and reported illness have declined over the last decade, despite better technology to detect an outbreak and increased reporting by those that fall ill. Industry groups want farmers to know about the revised guidelines for good agricultural practices before planting. Then the goal will be to let the consuming public know. "I think we have to show the consuming public as well as government officials that we can manage this," said Bryan Silbermann, president of the Produce Marketing Association." Consumer groups assert that having more funding for the FDA and putting one agency in charge of food safety would improve things greatly. President Bush opposes the idea of one agency, saying it is not necessary.

<http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/national/2007/01/03/75594.htm>

An editorial in the *Salinas Californian* asks the new chair of the Senate Agricultural Committee, Abel Maldonado (R-Santa Maria), to get the ball rolling and presses him to have a hearing on food safety. His predecessor, Sen. Jeff Denham (R-Merced) was poised to convene a meeting prior to being stripped of his post. That meeting was to have been held on Dec. 19. The editorial states that Maldonado has an ally in Denham as well as Anna Caballero (D-Salinas) who wants to make food safety a priority.

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2007701030326>