

Food Safety Alert – 1/18/07

The *Albert Lea Tribune* is reporting this morning that a third lawsuit has been filed against Taco John's in the recent outbreak of E. coli affecting that company. The lawsuit was the first to be filed in Minnesota. It was filed in Freeborn County District Court. Two others have already been filed in Iowa. Court papers say parent Julie Johnson and her son Mitchell Evans are seeking a jury trial. Defendants named are Freeborn County Taco, Inc., Eldon J. Hill, Denise F. Atkinson and James A. Atkinson, all doing business as Taco John's of Albert Lea. Court papers say the boy consumed a beef soft-shell taco on Dec. 1. Johnson and Evans seek unspecified monetary damages for systems that lasted more than a week. They claim Taco John's should accept liability for the food. It also claims the restaurant chain demonstrated breach of warranty and negligence. William Marler, attorney for the other two cases filed in Iowa, will also be handling this case.

<http://www.albertleatribune.com/articles/2007/01/18/news/news2.txt>

According to the *Monterey County Herald*, Fresh Express plans to invest \$2 million in research on E. coli bacteria. While the Salinas-based company has never been tied to a foodborne illness outbreak, it hopes the research will lead to new practices, technology and knowledge. The research will focus on ready-to-eat produce. Since May of last year, the company has been studying the most promising research for identifying how produce gets contaminated. They created a scientific panel that is composed of experts from state and federal food safety agencies. "The members of the panel are Dr. Michael T. Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota; Dr. Jeff Farrar, California Department of Health Services; Dr. Bob Buchanan, U.S. Food and Drug Administration; Dr. Robert Tauxe, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Dr. Bob Gravani, Cornell University; and Dr. Craig Hedberg, University of Minnesota." The research will focus on determining if the potentially deadly bacteria can be internalized into the root or leaf system of leafy greens. It also hopes to identify new technologies and strategies that can reduce the probability for contamination. Field studies will be conducted to isolate sources as well as factors that can affect the degree of contamination.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/16487570.htm>

An article in the *Salinas Californian* reports on the same topic. Fresh Express had originally planned to announce the panel and funding in November, but elected to put it off as outbreaks continued. Tanius Viviani, president of Fresh Express, said, "Toward the beginning of 2006, we decided to focus on some of the fundamental research beyond processing, harvesting and growing." In addition to researching the ability of the bacteria to internalize itself into the plant, identify new technologies and conducting field studies, they hope to determine if the pathogen can multiply in plants that are used for cover crops as well as determining if the bacteria has the ability to survive composting processes. "'We're all for it,' said Jim Bogart, president of the Grower-Shipper Association. 'There's an effort under way among the industry to raise even more money.'"

<http://www.thecalifornian.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070118/NEWS01/701180311>

The topic also made the *New York Times*:

<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/us/AP-E-Coli-Outbreak.html? r=1&oref=slogin>