

Food Safety Alert – 1/24/07

The *Monterey County Herald* is reporting that growers are gearing up for a showdown against lawmakers in Sacramento. State Sen. Dean Florez is expected to introduce a bill on February 1 that would force farmers to further protect leafy greens from contaminated water and animals that can spread bacteria. The legislation also calls for a system to trace produce from field to fork. Growers are balking at the legislation because, if enacted, it will mean a quarantine of their crops if they violate the proposed law. Western Growers is hoping the CDFA will adopt the Marketing Agreement before Florez has an opportunity to pitch his ideas in the capitol. The plan, as we know, would require handlers and shippers to restrict their purchases to growers who have shown the use of best agricultural practices in their farming operations. "We're the guys who understand our business and what needs to be done," said Imperial Valley spinach and lettuce farmer Jack Vessey, who supports the industry-led approach." Vessey and others agree that steps must be taken to make our food safer to eat and restore consumer confidence. However, they believe government regulation could be too costly. Speaking of Sen. Florez, Tom Russell, president of Salinas-based Pacific International Marketing, says, "It sounded like someone who really doesn't know our industry is going to regulate it," Russell said. "I thought, we need to do something ourselves." Consumer groups and public health advocates want regulation because they feel that the Marketing Agreement will not guarantee all farmers will live up to its standards.

Both proposals, according to the article, will specify how deep to bury fences to keep out animals as well as how far away from cattle operations produce can be grown. They will also identify a minimum standard for bacteria in irrigation water. Sen. Florez says his proposed legislation will go further than the Marketing Agreement because his would also ban the use of manure as fertilizer and reclaimed water. Florez wants the state to put aside \$25 million to pay for enforcement mechanisms. Many believe that the standards proposed by the industry will accomplish the goal of a safer product and can be implemented faster than the legislation could be.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/state/16532594.htm>

An AP article on the same topic from SF Gate.com can be found at this link:

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2007/01/24/financial/f032519S51.DTL&hw=coli&sn=001&sc=1000>

The *Salinas Californian* is running an article that says Salinas Mayor Dennis Donohue has asked Gov. Schwarzenegger to appear in TV ads to support the agricultural industry. The letter, sent on January 12 to the governor, requests Schwarzenegger appear in the commercials based upon a promise he made to the industry last October. "We want to take you up on your offer," Donohue said in comments directed at the governor." Donohue wants the ads to be generic commercials that simply promote California fresh vegetables. Mayor Donohue also announced the formation of the Leafy Green Oversight and Review Committee. It will be comprised of industry leaders and associations which include the California Farm Bureau Federation and the Western Growers Association. Their main goal will be to coordinate an economic recovery effort for the regions rebounding agricultural industry.

<http://www.thecalifornian.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070124/NEWS01/701240318>