

Food Safety Alert – 1/29/07

The *Salinas Californian* is reporting that evidence suggests a fourth person has died as a result of the E. coli outbreak in spinach this past September. According to the article new evidence has also surfaced to indicate a death last September may have been a part of the same outbreak, which could now bring the death toll to five. The latest victim was an 83 year-old woman from Richland, Washington. She died of heart failure in a rehabilitation facility. The other victim died on September 13. She was an 86 year-old from Hagerstown, Maryland. Apparently, Maryland Department of Health officials lost her culture samples so they were not able to confirm the cause of her illness. She had tested positive for O157:H7 while in the hospital. CDC tests on two bags of spinach in her refrigerator tested positive for the closely related strain of O146:H21. The CDC stated in a letter that the type of E. coli found in the bags was “indistinguishable” from that found in a sample of spinach from Illinois which yielded the outbreak strain O157:H7.

The latest victim’s lawyer, William Marler, said that Dole had been paying for her medical expenses in the rehabilitation center. Marler will speak at an Ag Forum luncheon on February 28 at the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas. The victim that died on September 13 had a half-eaten bag of Dole baby spinach in her refrigerator.

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070129/NEWS01/701290304>

An article on the *TriCityHerald.com* website calls the death of the woman from Richland, Washington into question. Her attorney, William Marler, says that fresh spinach contaminated with E. coli led to her death. However, Benton County Coroner Rick Corson says that it is premature to say the infection caused her death and that it is still under investigation. Corson says that other age-related health issues may have contributed to her death. “Although she did not develop hemolytic uremic syndrome, a complication that sometimes leads to kidney failure and death in E. coli patients, she became ‘very, very ill,’ Marler said.”

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/8597118p-8489926c.html>

The *Sacramento Bee* is running an article that weighs in on the agricultural industry self-regulating itself. The article says that consumer groups have strong concerns about the proposed Marketing Agreement, yet state agriculture officials are in agreement that it could create a safer food supply. Steve Lyle, director of public affairs for the CDFA says the agency wants to work with the agricultural industry to find solutions. “The department, which has no regulatory authority over fresh produce production, last week released a proposed voluntary Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement that would set up a new inspection program -- designed and directed mostly by industry members -- under the state's auspices. A seal of approval would go on produce sold by handlers taking part in the agreement.”

State Sen. Dean Florez believes any attempts to advance food safety need to come from outside the agricultural industry. “His legislative package would set new industry standards, such as banning raw fertilizer and mandating fencing and buffers to keep livestock from produce fields.” Dr. Kevin Reilly, deputy director of prevention services for CDHS, says that the issue is a critical one. “Since 1997, 22 outbreaks of the same lethal strain of E. coli bacteria that was involved in last fall's events have been linked to the leafy green industry.” Reilly believe that the Marketing Agreement is one possibility for quickly promoting better practices and getting the inspection process rolling. Elisa Odabashian, director of the West Coast office of Consumers Union doesn't like the fact that the advisory board for the Marketing Agreement will comprise 13 members from the industry with one possible member from the public. “‘This is a very closed, very insular process,’ she said. ‘I understand they're the people with the agricultural expertise. But they're also the people who brought us E. coli in spinach and lettuce. This serves the industry, not the public.’”

<http://www.sacbee.com/111/story/114684.html>

According to an article on the *Dailyiowan.com* website, experts believe that another E. coli outbreak is a certainty. “‘If you look at what has happened over the last few years with E. coli, it is no longer limited to just undercooked meat,’ said Mary DeMartino, a UI public-health microbiologist. ‘We are finding it in

spinach, lettuce, vegetables, and juices. The number of foods we have found it in has increased." DeMartino says the spread of bacteria can be attributed to mass production and transportation. "Dee Jurgens, a manager at John's Grocery, 401 E. Market St., said the business is only now putting the fear of E. coli-laden spinach behind it. Thursday was the first time spinach graced its shelves since the September outbreak." John Besser, a clinical laboratory manager for the Minnesota Department of Health, says that scientists' ability to tackle the problem will improve over time, but the problem will always persist. "The relationship between germs and people is a long one, and it looks like we will never eliminate the problem of it."

<http://media.www.dailyiowan.com/media/storage/paper599/news/2007/01/26/Metro/Expert.E.Coli.Outbreak.Certain-2679717.shtml?sourcedomain=www.dailyiowan.com&MIIHost=media.collegepublisher.com>