

Food Safety Alert – 10/25/06

The nonprofit group, Center for Science in the Public Interest (“CSPI”) has petitioned (see petition here: http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/ca_produce_petition.pdf) the Governor for mandatory state regulations governing manure, water and sanitation on farms that could help prevent produce-borne food outbreaks, stating “California should implement standards to protect its consumers and its produce industry, instead of waiting for Congress or one of the federal agencies with food safety responsibilities to step in . . . This is clearly a case where prompt action at the state level could prevent future outbreaks.” The group is pushing for measures similar to the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) standards that meat and poultry producers are required to comply with nationwide.

<http://cspinet.org/new/200610251.html>

CSPI has also contacted U.S. Health and Human Services director for the purpose of “request[ing] that the department does a fair and accurate reporting of the deaths and illnesses linked to the recent spinach outbreak. Specifically, CSPI asked that Leavitt declare June Edith Dunning, an elderly Maryland woman who died September 13 from complications due to E. coli O157:H7, as the fourth fatal victim of the spinach outbreak...and further, that Leavitt personally assess the methods being used by CDC to distinguish ‘official’ cases from “suspect” cases and give a full accounting of the public health impact of this outbreak.”

Here is a copy of the letter:

http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/leavitt_letter.pdf.

In related news, the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition got positive test approximately one year ago for E. coli and a common pesticide in 11 Merced and Madera county waterway samples, forcing nearly 1,000 farmers to grapple with potentially expensive cleanup efforts. The results have only recently been publicized because of the E. coli outbreak and the highlight on government v. industry oversight of food safety. In August, the Coalition began contacting farmers for details on farming practices near the contaminated waterways.

A copy of the article from the Modesto Bee is here:

<http://www.modbee.com/ag/story/12933556p-13590163c.html>

According to the FDA, to date, 204 cases of illness due to E. coli O157:H7 infection have been reported to the CDC including 31 cases involving a type of kidney failure called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS), 104 hospitalizations, and three deaths. The first death was an elderly woman in Wisconsin; the second death, a two-year-old in Idaho; and the third death, an elderly woman in Nebraska.

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/spinacqa.html#howmany>