

# Food Safety Alert – 11/21/06

The FDA website now contains the senate testimony of Dr. Robert Brackett, Director of the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition at the FDA. He begins with an introduction that asserts the policies of the FDA have resulted in declines of food borne illness to 1996 and 1998 levels. He indicates, however, that the recent outbreak shows that further and continued progress is warranted. He states that the focus should now be on ready-to-eat fresh fruits and vegetables. He then outlines the role of the FDA and the CDC in food safety, initiatives to enhance the safety of fresh produce (GAPs are mentioned at this point) and the next steps that need to be taken to prevent further outbreaks. He then tells us that the FDA will hold a public meeting to address food borne illness caused by leafy greens. He identifies the four areas that need addressing to either prevent or contain future outbreaks, those being: 1) strategies to prevent contamination; 2) ways to minimize the health impact after an occurrence; 3) ways to improve communication; and 4) specific research.

Brackett indicates “FDA, the State of California, CDC, and the USDA continue to investigate the cause of the outbreak. The environmental and on-site investigation has included inspections and sample collection in facilities, the environment, and water. In addition, investigators have reviewed and evaluated animal management practices, water use, and the environmental conditions that could have led to contamination of the spinach. The field investigation team has included experts in multiple disciplines from FDA, CDC, USDA, and the State of California.” He reiterates that the cause has not yet been identified by stating later in his testimony, “we continue to look for more information as to the source and mechanism of contamination.”

<http://www.fda.gov/ola/2006/foodsafety1115.html>

Both the KSBWchannel.com and the Santa Cruz Sentinel posted stories online dealing with last Thursday’s congressional luncheon hosted by Sam Farr. This was discussed in my update of Friday, Nov. 17. However, I provide the links to those who may have missed the update.

<http://www.theksbwchannel.com/news/10339653/detail.html>

<http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2006/November/17/local/stories/05local.htm>

An article in *Ag Alert* says that the California Farm Bureau Federation is working with Western Growers Association to develop self-imposed mandatory food safety regulations. Farmers, processors, and marketers are all cooperating with both researchers and government agencies to develop good agricultural practices that “reflect the latest and best scientific information.” The goal is to ensure that these practices are followed 100% of the time by all farmer, processors and marketers. CFBF President Doug Mosebar says, “the system for establishing good agricultural practices standards could include creation of a marketing order or marketing agreement.” The result of the actions would be to create enhanced and mandatory processes on “all aspects of growing, packing, processing and shipping of spinach and leafy greens.” Enforcement and verification would be done by state and federal regulatory agencies. Under a marketing order or marketing agreement, there would be sanctions for non-compliance.

In a related article from *Ag Alert*, “major food service and retail grocery organizations say they want uniform safety standards in place by Dec. 15. In addition, the groups are calling for more fresh vegetable crops being added to a mandatory certification program by Feb. 15.” The United Fresh Produce Association and Western Growers Association recently sent a letter to the Produce Marketing Association identifying a 10-point list of expectations. Ken Oneto, chairman of the CFBF’s Specialty Crops Advisory Committee says, “we’re at a place where we have to decide if we want to govern ourselves on food-safety issues or have it come from the outside.” He continues, “farmers know best what cultural practices work best for their specific commodity.” Also discussed was the possibility of a marketing order or marketing agreement. (These instruments are authorized by the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937 and its amendments).