

Food Safety Alert – 12/04/06

According to the *Salinas Californian*, there are still lingering concerns over two months after the spinach outbreak. Those concerns center around a lingering investigation with state and federal officials that appears to be affecting the industries recovery. While many leaders in the agricultural community have supported and continue to support a thorough investigation, without any closure consumers won't return to eating spinach or other leafy greens. Joseph Pezzini, chair of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, believes it is time for the state and federal probe to be narrowed or ended. He awaits a report to help the farmers of this area understand the lessons to be learned from the outbreak. The FDA and CDHS have declined to set a deadline to release their report. Michael Herndon, a spokesman for the FDA, has stated that there have been no new finding related to the investigation. He did state that once their investigation is over, there will be public meetings or a teleconference to discuss the findings. The FBI is still investigating whether a crime was committed or not. They have not decided if they will recommend charges to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

State Senator Jeff Denham and U.S. Representative Sam Farr are working out legislation to prevent another outbreak as well as provide financial assistance to local spinach growers. Sam Farr will hold a public meeting on Dec. 19 in Salinas. It is meant to allow folks to vet and to provide the latest information on the investigation. State Senator Dean Flores would like greater enforcement than a marketing order. He believes that laws must be on the books and that there must be significant penalties for non-compliance to the minimum standard a law would provide.

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061202/NEWS01/612020355&SearchID=73264932254188>

KUTV in Salt Lake City is reporting that E. coli outbreaks may become a thing of the past. Doctors at Drexel University have developed a test that can detect several types of E. coli in just under 10 minutes. Current methods can take up to 24 hours. With the new technology, if food is contaminated, a sensor goes off and shows up on a computer. The method can be used by food packagers and eventually by consumers in their home. Experts say that the best way to protect ourselves against E. coli and other bacteria is to carefully wash our vegetables and fruits and to thoroughly cook our meat.

http://kutv.com/health/local_story_334194520.html

In an article on the Commonvoice.com website, we find Fresh Express trying to regain consumer confidence by putting flyers in local newspapers offering a buy-one-get-one-free on their Baby Spinach, Spring Mix, Green & Crisp and Hearts of Romaine. On the advertisement they write : *"OUR PROMISE TO YOU: When you buy Fresh Express ready-to-eat salads, you have our pledge to provide the absolute freshest, safest, and highest quality salads and greens available. FOOD SAFETY, OUR NUMBER 1 PRIORITY."*

<http://www.commonvoice.com/article.asp?colid=6322>

A *USA Today* article is referenced in the Commonvoice article and can be found here:

http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/2006-10-22-fresh-express-usat_x.htm

The *Monterey County Herald* is reporting that investigators in New Jersey are looking into another E. coli outbreak. The Associated Press is reporting that at least 15 people have been affected. Most range in ages between 7-14 years old. Almost all of them appear to have eaten at a local Taco Bell restaurant and a few of them have come down with hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). It is believed that some meat was undercooked. The restaurant has been closed voluntarily since last Thursday.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/16159569.htm>