

Food Safety Alert – 12/07/06

According to the *Salinas Californian*, U.S. Rep. Sam Farr has introduced legislation to improve food safety and assist agricultural industry members that suffered losses as a result of the outbreak caused by fresh spinach. Despite FDA assurances that spinach is safe to eat, many consumers still remain wary. "At a time when doctors and parents are concerned about obesity and harmful eating habits among American adults and children, we need to do everything possible to make sure consumers are not turned off to one of the healthiest foods out there, spinach," Farr said in a statement. The bill introduced by Sam Farr is called the Spinach Research and Recovery Act of 2006. It authorizes \$26 million for food safety research and is dedicated to fresh produce. Emergency funds assistance would be provided to handlers and producers who suffered losses when they voluntarily recalled their spinach. Farr says focus in the past has been on protecting the meat supply, not fresh produce.

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061206/NEWS01/61206003>

The press release from Sam Farr's website:

<http://www.farr.house.gov/issues2.cfm?id=12347>

And the KSBW website:

<http://www.theksbwchannel.com/news/10477355/detail.html>

In an article posted on the *USA Today* website, the FDA reported that the outbreak of potentially deadly E. coli strain O157:H7 had been traced to Taco Bell restaurants in four states: New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Delaware. Consumer groups and scientists have yet again called for better oversight of the nation's food system. According to the FDA, to date it has sickened 43 people and sent 35 to the hospital since the outbreak occurred on November 20. Preliminary tests indicate that green onions were the cause. "You need the mandate and the resources behind it to fix the problem. It's not an overnight fix," says Michael Doyle, director of the Center for Food Safety at the University of Georgia. The overwhelming majority of green onions eaten in the U.S. this time of year come from Mexico. There have been nine outbreaks of illness linked to green onions since 1994. The article points out that more than 30% of the produce that is consumed in America is imported, yet only 1% is inspected by the FDA. A distribution center in southern New Jersey is at the center of the investigation.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2006-12-06-taco-bell-ecoli_x.htm?csp=34

On the Marler-Clark website, William Marler called on Taco Bell and its parent company, Yum! Brands, Inc., to do the right thing for their customers and pay the medical bills of the victim's in this latest E. coli outbreak. At least two victims have developed hemolytic uremic syndrome. (HUS sufferers have abnormal kidney functions many years later and few require long-term dialysis or develop lifelong complications).

<http://www.marlerclark.com/news/taco-bell-ecoli002.htm>