

# Food Safety Alert – 12/13/06

The Californian is reporting that State Senator Jeff Denham (R-Merced) received a double dose of bad news yesterday afternoon. Senate leader Don Perata (D-Oakland) shuffled committees and Denham is to be replaced as chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee by Senator Abel Maldonado (R-Santa Maria). "I can anticipate that he will not be chairing the ag committee next year,' Perata said of Denham. "When that (committee) does get reconstituted, it will be somebody else as chairman."

The second piece of bad news is that there will be an indefinite delay in the Salinas hearing Denham had planned for December 19 as it won't get legislative authorization in time. "I think it is unfortunate for consumers that the Rules Committee is denying this public hearing on E. coli,' Denham said." The bad news appears to be politically motivated. "The changes may be rooted in a recent contest in the Senate GOP caucus over who would lead the Republicans in 2007. Ackerman overcame a challenge from Sen. Jim Battin, R-La Quinta, to retain the job. While GOP senators won't confirm it publicly, Capitol Weekly, which covers statehouse politics, reported that Denham backed Battin and Maldonado supported Ackerman in the leadership contest."

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061213/NEWS01/612130308>

In an AP article posted earlier this morning, the CDC is reportedly stating that green onions are not the cause of the E. coli outbreak in Taco Bells throughout the Northeast. Boskovich Farms was its supplier, but Taco Bell switched when it learned the problem was not related to the processing plant or distribution center.

Lawmakers, including Sens. Clinton and Schumer are calling on federal agencies to create a joint task force to examine the recent E. coli outbreaks and recommend changes to laws and regulation to help prevent further contamination of food.

[http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20061213/ap\\_on\\_bi\\_ge/e\\_coli\\_outbreak\\_taco\\_bell\\_11](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20061213/ap_on_bi_ge/e_coli_outbreak_taco_bell_11)

It also appears that yellow onions are not the cause. While testing positive for E. coli, they were not the same strain that were genetically "fingerprinted" in the outbreak according to the CDC. *In fact, the strain present in the yellow onions has never been seen before in ill persons in this country.* Presently, no other food item has a definite or preliminary test indicating the presence of the sub-type O157:H7.

<http://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/current.htm>

The Taco John's E. coli outbreak has spread to Minnesota. According to WEAU-TV, the number of infected people in the state has rose to seven. The suspected cases have occurred in Albert Lea and Austin, Minnesota. Kirk Smith, head of the food-borne disease unit of the Minnesota Health Department, says there will likely be more cases. Currently, Taco John's is working with distributors to check the origin of its produce. The restaurants remain open. However, they have thrown out all foods and replaced them with new items.

<http://www.weau.com/news/headlines/4895531.html>