

Food Safety Alert – 12/20/06

An article in the *Monterey County Herald* points out that as farmers strive to make their produce safer for consumers, it is sometimes done at the detriment to water quality and natural habitats. ""There's a tension between measures that are designed to implement best management practices for water quality and practices to enhance food safety,' said Monterey County assistant agricultural commissioner Bob Roach. 'It's a conflict noted long before the spinach outbreak.'" The problem lies in the fact that conservation measures to ensure water quality many times involve planting vegetation near river and creek beds. The vegetation captures sediment and breaks down residues in the water, leading to better water quality. On the surface that doesn't appear to be a problem. However, this practice, when done near row crops can have a negative impact because it attracts wildlife. Wildlife that can migrate away from the waterways and onto nearby farmland. "In the absence of direct knowledge about what caused the E. coli contamination and how best to prevent it, he said, 'people who audit food safety may look at a filter strip as opportunity for wildlife to inhabit, but we really don't know how big that risk is. It's an area where more research is going to be needed to make these two goals compatible.'" A study by UC Santa Cruz indicates that good agricultural practices and best management practices for water quality can go hand-in-hand. The Resource Conservation District is trying to get funding that would give them specific data through a survey of Central Coast farmers on the impact of food safety measures on water quality and the situations where E. coli contamination occurs or can occur. From there, you can attempt to mitigate the spread of the potentially deadly bacteria onto row crop farmland.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/16280466.htm>

A similar article on the same topic in the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/12/19/MNGVHN291V1.DTL>

According to the National Center for Policy Analysis and an article in the Wall Street Journal, special interests have blocked approval of irradiation technology that could kill 99.999 percent of E. coli in fruits and vegetables. It is said that fresh-cut produce can withstand a 1.0 kGy dose of radiation before it impacts the quality or taste. Irradiation is not a widely used technique because of political pressure, media scare tactics and bureaucratic and industry timidity the article contends. 325,000 American are hospitalized and 5, 000 die each year from all sources of contaminated food.

http://www.ncpa.org/sub/dpd/index.php?page=article&Article_ID=13979

In an effort to mitigate damage from the E. coli contamination earlier this month and late last month, Taco John's CEO Paul Fisherkeller said that the restaurant chain would cover the medical costs for all of customers sickened by the bacteria. At least 80 people became ill after eating at the restaurant in one Iowa city and two Minnesota cities. ""We've been in business 38 years and this is the first time in the history of our chain that we've ever had this type of an incident, and it's been a shock to us all,' Fisherkeller said." Health officials suspect tainted lettuce as the vehicle of contamination. There have been no new cases since Dec. 3. Taco John's is headquartered in Cheyenne, Wyoming and has 430 restaurants 26 states. 133 of them are located in Iowa and Minnesota.

<http://www.billingsgazette.net/articles/2006/12/19/news/wyoming/28-taco.txt>