

Food Safety Alert – 12/28/06

In an article from the *Charleston Daily Mail*, U.S. food writers picked the top 10 stories news stories related to food from this year. The survey was done by Hunter Public Relations and polled 1,200 food writers across the country. The E. coli outbreak from spinach received the largest number of votes. "E. coli-contaminated spinach traced to a farm in California's Salinas Valley killed three people and infected more than 200 people in 26 states this past September, bringing the topic of food safety back into the limelight once again."

<http://www.dailymail.com/story/Life/+2006122716/U.S-food-writers-pick-E-coli-scare-as-top-story/>

Even though the government sees the recurring outbreaks of food-borne illness as "unacceptable" in today's world, experts say federal regulators still can't answer key questions according to an article in the *Columbus Dispatch*. Six years after the FDA issued food safety guidelines to produce growers, it still has not done the research that would enable it to write regulations that would decrease the number of food-borne illness cases across the country. "For example, does water used for irrigating crops have to be clean enough for people to drink? And, because cow manure is a common source of E. coli, how far from a cow pasture does a spinach patch have to be? Across the road? A quartermile away? A mile?" Without this knowledge, no specific criteria can be met or enforced. "The idea of sending inspectors out right away is fairly useless, because without the basic science to set workable standards, you can't know what will work," said William Hubbard, a former FDA associate commissioner for policy, planning and legislation." Some suggest that the problem lies in the fact that FDA funding hasn't increased with expenses for the professional staff. For example, the FDA budget in 2003 was \$407 million. It has been allocated \$450 million for 2007.

<http://www.dispatch.com/national-story.php?story=dispatch/2006/12/26/20061226-A7-00.html>

In FDA news not related to the E. coli outbreaks, the Associated Press is reporting that the FDA is ready to give the OK to food from cloned animals. Federal scientists claim that there is no difference between cloned and conventional livestock. The meat and milk are said to be just as safe. The FDA will not require special labels that indicate the meat is from cloned animals or their offspring. "Consumers are going to be having a product that has potential safety issues and has a whole load of ethical issues tied to it, without any labeling," said Joseph Mendelson, legal director of the Center for Food Safety." FDA scientists have concluded that when clones reach 6 to 18 months of age, they are "virtually indistinguishable" from animals bred in the conventional way. Final approval is months away. The FDA will accept comments from the public after issuing a risk assessment today. According to the article, cloning allows farmers to make copies of "exceptional" animals – ones that fatten quickly or are good milk producers. Currently, farmers and cloning companies have been asked to voluntarily keep clones and their offspring out of the food supply. In a recent poll, 64 percent of the population are uncomfortable with the idea of eating meat or drinking milk that came from a cloned animal.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16372490/>