

Food Safety Alert – 2/12/07

The E. coli outbreak at Taco Bell was tied to tainted lettuce grown in Central California according to an article in the *Salinas Californian*. "FDA spokesman Michael Herndon on Friday announced the origin of the infected lettuce served by Taco Bell. The announcement came in response to a Gannett News Service story that referred to earlier news reports -- never confirmed by the FDA -- that the E. coli outbreak might have occurred from produce imported from Mexico." A final report on the E. coli outbreak associated with Taco Bell is at least a month away. Prior to the final report, the agency will give its final report on the outbreak linked to spinach grown in Monterey or San Benito Counties.

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2007702100319>

An article in the *Arizona Republic* says that cooler weather could help in preventing E. coli contamination in Yuma's lettuce and spinach. "In the history of Yuma agriculture, we have never had any sort of an outbreak with our leafy-greens," said Kurt Nolte, area agriculture agent for the Yuma County Cooperative Extension, part of the University of Arizona. "The nature of food outbreaks occurs during the warm periods of the year." Karl Matthews, an associate professor of food science at Rutgers University in New Jersey, says colder weather doesn't kill the bacteria, but doesn't allow it to grow either.

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/business/articles/0211biz-lettuce0211.html>

According to the *Green Bay Press Gazette*, U.S. Rep. Rose DeLauro, D-Conn., chairwoman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on agriculture, will hold a series of hearings on food safety this year. The Senate Appropriations subcommittee also plans to hold a hearing in which FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach is expected to testify. Currently, the FDA regulates 80 percent of the nation's food supply, yet it only receives 25 percent of the government's funding for food safety. Most funds go to the USDA. Experts say that the need for federal action is clear, but they are not sure if reallocating money or combining the agencies would improve food safety.

<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070209/GPG0101/702090641/1207/GPGnews>

Scientists at the University of Southampton in England have found that E. coli O157:H7 cannot survive on certain copper alloy surfaces. The study compared the ability of copper alloys to eliminate E. coli with stainless steel, which is commonly used for food processing surfaces. The survival rates were compared in regard to both temperature and exposure time. "The results were significant. While stainless steel had no effect on the viability of the E. coli at room temperature, three copper casting alloys effectively eliminated it, and two others significantly reduced it. The bacteria sample tested on silicon bronze (95% copper) were significantly reduced in 45 minutes and completely eradicated in 75 minutes. Brass (85% copper) and red brass (93% copper) killed the bacteria in 3.0 hours and 4.5 hours, respectively. Significant reductions were noted after six hours on Ni- Al bronze (81% copper) and yellow brass (61% copper)." Stainless steel also did not have an effect at colder temperatures either.

<http://www.azobuild.com/news.asp?newsID=3080>