

Food Safety Alert – 2/20/07

The *Salinas Californian* is reporting this morning that Sen. Dean Florez's three bills aimed at regulating agriculture in the wake of the recent E. coli outbreaks, will likely go down to veto by the governor. As a result, Florez is now considering an independent panel to ensure food safety. This "hybrid commission" would combine his goals with some aspects of the recently certified Marketing Agreement. "'I'm going to try a global compromise deal on this that gives consumers assurance that the government has a stronger hand on leafy greens (protection) but allows growers to use their best practices in their fields,' Florez said." He believes this will help get a deal done.

Sen. Jeff Denham is skeptical of Florez's approach. Denham says "the lawmaker is 'very open to understanding the facts on each of the various issues as they come up,' but added, 'I feel on this one he has jumped the gun.'" He (Denham) thinks regulation is premature until you have a conclusive body of science behind the sources and movement of E. coli in produce.

Assemblywoman Anna Caballero agrees with Denham. "'How does this pathogen found in the feces of cattle end up on the plants? Is it endemic inside the plant or on the outside, and can it be washed off? The scientists need to study all the pathways,' she added. 'Until they do that kind of study, it's very difficult to regulate.'"

"While he is now rethinking his leafy green legislation Florez claimed that his work is 'making Western Growers run faster.'" The California Leafy Green Advisory Board, created to oversee the Marketing Agreement, will hold its first meeting this Friday. The Board plans to consider new rules and assessments for state inspectors to enforce the new rules.

"Despite Florez's hard-charging style, Sen. Abel Maldonado, R-Santa Maria, who favors giving the marketing agreement a chance to work, is confident that he and others can agree on a workable food safety approach with his long-time legislative colleague. 'Dean wants what I want,' Maldonado said. 'He wants consumers to be safe and he wants farmers to stay farming, so I think we can compromise and come together on the same common ground.'"

<http://www.californianonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2007702190302>

Senator Durbin of Illinois and Congresswoman DeLauro of Connecticut have reintroduced their Safe Food Act. The legislation calls for a single agency to implement and manage a food safety program aimed at standardizing American food safety activities. Currently there are at least 15 agencies that collectively administer 30 laws on the safeness of food monitoring, inspection and labeling.

"From the *E. coli* outbreak that pulled spinach off store shelves to the Taco Bell outbreak that sickened 71 individuals in 5 states, it is clear that our food safety structure is collapsing and endangering public health," said DeLauro. "The GAO confirmed this by designating the federal oversight of food safety as a high-risk area in need of broad-based transformation to achieve greater effectiveness and accountability. The report notes that the patchwork nature of the federal oversight of food safety calls into question whether the government can plan more strategically to inspect food production processes, identify and react more quickly to any food-borne illness outbreaks."

The new agency will be called the Food Safety Administration if the bill becomes law. The legislation would lead to regular, but random inspection of all food processing plants, a categorized review process for all foods to monitor and inspect them on their risk, give increased oversight of imported foods, and establish requirements for tracing foods to their point of origin.

http://www.house.gov/delauro/press/2007/February/Safe_Food_Act_Reintroduction_02_14_07.html

The *Western Farm Press* says that the California feral pig population is far bigger than previously thought. (Wild pigs were implicated the E. coli contamination of spinach last fall). "Using computer-aided mapping and records of hunting tags, Rick Sweitzer, a wildlife ecologist at the University of North Dakota supported by the University of California Exotic/Invasive Pests and Diseases Research Program has

calculated how far wild pigs have expanded their range in California to encourage using alternative methods to control their spread.” The mapping research concludes, at least preliminarily, that feral pigs have increased their range by 7,000 square miles between 1992 and 2004.

Sweitzer sent a survey to agricultural commissioners that asked questions about the history and trends of wild pig-related agriculture damage. He also designed maps for the commissioners and asked them to specifically mark areas where damage was occurring. “Once the areas with agricultural damage are linked up with the mapped locations of hunter-killed wild pigs, we will be able to identify statistical linkages between regions of important agricultural damage and wild pig population abundance.” He hopes that once actual dollars numbers are assigned to the agricultural damage they cause, he hopes lawmakers will think seriously about other approaches to managing their numbers.

What is surprising about this data is that the State has very liberal hunting regulations on feral pigs – year-round bagging and no possession limits. And since 1956, the California Department of Fish and Game has classified them as big game to attract hunters to curb their growth.

<http://westernfarmpress.com/news/021907-wild-pig/>