

Food Safety Alert – 3/06/07

According to the *Hollister Freelance*, growers and packers could lose up to \$74 million in sales because of the E. coli outbreak in spinach last fall. Since then, the industry has worked hard to develop and implement new food safety standards to win back consumer confidence. Some feel that is not enough. Consumers Union, publisher of Consumer Reports, says it doesn't go far enough to protect the public. They released a statement last week calling on regulation of the leafy green industry's GAPs and BMPs.

However, many in San Benito County believe the industry is doing the right thing. Here, consumer confidence is strong. "Kristi Haas of Hollister said her family hasn't stopped eating spinach and trusts the industry's safety practices. 'They are taking the necessary safety precautions,' Haas said." Others agree. "Megan Ward, who owns Mainstreet Bistro in Hollister, said the spinach salad was the most popular item on her menu before the outbreak. Although the salad's popularity declined in the aftermath of the outbreak, Ward said her patrons rarely shy away from ordering items containing spinach."

While legislator's and farmers disagree on how to go about establishing tougher food safety measures, one thing can be agreed on: consumer safety. "Richard Silva, vice president of the San Benito County Farm Bureau, said handlers and growers have acted quickly to develop and implement new safety standards. 'The advantage to the marketing order is an immediate response to the situation,' Silva said. 'And that is something that the government is never very good at doing.' As Silva and other growers gear up to plant the year's first spinach crops next week, he said they are already addressing safety concerns, such as planting in locations to minimize contamination risks. 'Everything is being dictated by food safety,' Silva said."

<http://www.freelancenews.com/news/contentview.asp?c=207973>

To read the full transcript of testimony from Consumers Union West Coast Office Director, Elisa Odabashian, at the California Senate Select Committee on Food-Borne Illness - Public Informational Hearing on the California Department of Food and Agriculture's California Leafy Green Marketing Agreement, follow this link:

http://www.consumersunion.org/pub/core_food_safety/004283.html

Food experts are saying that more cash is needed to protect the nation's food supply, according to an article written by Reuters Health and Science Editor. In the article, Maggie Fox says Congress is starting its annual review of funding for the federal government and there is a focus on food safety. She feels greater funding should be given to the FDA. Since 2003, the FDA has lost 500 of its 4,000 inspectors.

"Foodborne disease outbreaks are clearly evolving here in the United States,' said Dr. Ali Khan, Deputy Director for the National Center for Zoonotic, Vector-Borne, and Enteric Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention." Khan says this is because of centralized food processing. He is thankful we have tools like the CDC's PulseNet, a network of state health labs that makes quicker work of identifying when we have a true outbreak.

"The 2008 Health and Human Services Department budget is seeking more money, mostly for the FDA, 'to develop better and more rapid methods of detecting foodborne illness, improve capacity to respond to outbreaks in the field, and build improved data systems to support the agency's import inspection activities,' a spokeswoman said." Bush has proposed an additional \$10.8 Million for the FDA in 2008.

http://today.reuters.com/news/articlenews.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2007-03-02T225033Z_01_N02332590_RTRUKOC_0_US-FOOD-SAFETY.xml&pageNumber=1&imageid=&cap=&sz=13&WTModLoc=NewsArt-C1-ArticlePage1