

Food Safety Alert – 3/14/07

More has been written about the CDHS refusal to provide the Senate Select Committee on Food-borne Illness with the results of the joint FDA/CDHS investigation - this time in the Sacramento Bee. Sen. Dean Florez chairs the committee. "Time is a luxury we don't have," the Shafter Democrat said at a legislative hearing Monday. "We cannot wait any longer to solve this problem." According to Jennifer Kent, Associate Secretary of Legislative Affairs with the CDHS, "we believe it will be released in the coming weeks."

The results of the investigation will likely play a role in many of the lawsuits filed on behalf of last fall's E. coli victims. In a recent interview, Bill Marler, the Seattle-based attorney representing over 90 of the victims, said "if you had people down there looking around, it wasn't rocket science to figure out which farm it was." Brad Sullivan, representing the grower, said there wasn't a direct link between the E. coli and the farm where the spinach was alleged to have been grown. "They never found (*E. coli*) in the fields that we farm,' he said. 'They found it in pastures half a mile or a mile away.'"

Dr. Kevin Reilly, deputy director of prevention services for the state Department of Health Services, was invited to testify at the hearing but did not. However, after the hearing concluded he answered questions from reporters. He said the recommendations on how to stop contamination from occurring (that will be included in the report) are being used as input into the Marketing Agreement. The MA is set to become effective on April 1. The Schwarzenegger administration backs the MA as the fastest way to implement better GAPs. As we know, Florez sees any program that is "voluntary" as ineffective.

<http://www.sacbee.com/770/story/133359.html>

According to the *Monterey County Herald*, President Bush will be issuing a disaster declaration for agricultural counties in California that suffered from the deep freeze in January. This declaration would allow farmers affected by the freeze to apply for federal disaster unemployment assistance and food commodities. California's Congressional delegation is working to include this money in an emergency war spending bill expected to hit the House floor next week.

Language in the bill includes \$20 million to help farmers with clean up and billions for crop losses. The bill also provides for \$25 million in assistance to spinach growers affected by last fall's E. coli outbreak. Klamath River salmon fishermen would receive \$60.4 million due to a curtailed fishing season. The fate of the bill is uncertain as it currently includes language demanding troop level withdraws in Iraq.

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/state/16900208.htm>

The *Green Bay Press-Gazette* has posted an editorial today that calls the FDA guidance to processors of leafy greens a good first step. The author says that these are good, commonsense recommendations; but wishes it hadn't taken four outbreaks since last fall to heighten attention on food safety. "The rules are voluntary for now, but the FDA hasn't ruled out the possibility that it might eventually establish mandatory rules for the industry. We applaud the FDA for first taking voluntary steps, rather than beginning with a heavy governmental hand. Agriculture and food processing are major industries in Wisconsin, which we believe are committed to putting a healthy product on the grocers' shelves."

<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070314/GPG06/703140574/1269>